Representations of the Erotic

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego

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On the cover
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1.

The sea is not a long way from love and its goddess, as if the energy of the erotic was nourished by the force of the aquatic. In Hesiod, the story of love and its divinity, Aphrodite, is inseparable not only from the "restless, white-capped sea",[1] but it is also clearly emphasized that the originary location of love has nothing to do with the land: what is "thrown" into the sea is cast, the poet maintains, from the sky "clear of mainland". Love is born out of "something" which has been thrown into the open sea the movement of which brings it closer to the land ("Her first approach to land was near holy Kythera"). Out of the sea towards the land is a direction taken by the erotic undertaken under the auspices of heavenly violence. Vico with his characteristic sense of etymology and language notes this combination of elements which constitutes the erotic: "From the whistle of the lightning must also have come the Latin *cel*, one of the monosyllables of Ausonius, pronounced however with the Spanish cedilla (c), which is required to give point to Ausonius's own jesting line about Venus: *Nata salo, suscepta solo, patre edita caelo*, 'Born of the sea, adopted by the soil, raised by her father to the sky'."[2]

2.

What finds its way into the sea is by no means unimportant not only because it will produce a body of the goddes of love but also because it used to belong to somebody else's body. *Before love is formed, another body is de-formed and*

[1] Hesiod, *Works and Days; Theogony*, tr. S. Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 66. All further quotes from Hesiod will come from this edition.

[2] G. Vico, *The New Science*, tr. T. Bergin, M. Fisch (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 150.

mutilated; Boticelli does not even allude to the scene of the primal violence in which the birth of Venus is irrevocably rooted. Kronos, in an act of the Catilinarian conspiracy in which he gets entangled by his mother, murders with "the fiendishly long and jagged sickle" his father Ouranos (could the whistling Vico hears in Zeus' lightning also be a sound of a sickle cutting through the air?), and the mysterious "something" which is tossed into the sea "clear of the mainland" are the genitals of the father. The erotic is thus profoundly involved in the scene of the fundamental disobedience and utmost rebellion against the father. The erotic and the torturous have a common genesis. "I go as far as to believe that. . .the world of death is at the base of erotism. The feeling of sin is connected in lucid consciousness to the idea of death, and in the same manner the feeling of sin is connected with pleasure."[3]

3.

The castration of Ouranos is not, however, an act of blind violence. In the scheme of events it is prepared at least by one important circumstance: Kronos hates his father because of his double role in the family. On the one hand, Ouranos is a parent, a most productive originator whom Kronos refers to as "lecherous". On the other hand, however, Ouranos wants to thwart the natural cycle of reproduction by reversing its direction – the children have been fathered, but they are forced, in the act of double violence – against the mother and the children, to regress towards the maternal womb as soon as they are born. Kronos rebels against the monstrosity of the never ending artificial pregnancy and wandering along the alimentary and uterine canals of the maternal labyrinth. In Hesiod's version "Ouranos used to stuff all of his children/ Back into a hollow of Earth soon as they were born,/ Keeping them from the light, an awful thing to do. . .". Kronos sets out to liberate the mother from her abominable and nefarious pregnancy, to finalize the process of child-bearing, and thus to, as if, become himself a mother figure, a great liberator, one who sets children, alive but not quite living, suspended half way between death and life, free from the cave of the maternal body. "This cave is grave; this womb is tomb. We are not yet born: we are dead. The souls of children not yet born are the souls of ancestors dead."[4] Cioran refers to a pregnant woman as to a "corpse-bearer": "I was alone in that cemetary overlooking the village when a pregnant woman came in. I left at once, in order not to look at this corpse bearer at close range, nor to ruminate upon the contrast between the aggressive womb and the time-worn tombs – between a false promise and the end of all promises."[5] The erotic speaks of this vicinity between desire and death, which is closed for what is merely seductive – of the fact that the womb (and the sea as its form) is also a cave of death where the penis and child die and are buried.

[3] G. Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice", tr. J. Strauss, *Yale French Studies*, No. 78 (1990), p. 223.
[4] N. O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 42.
[5] E. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, tr. R. Howard (New York: Seaver Book, 1976), p. 151.

4.

Venus is born from the genitals of the father cut off by the son and tossed into the sea which, being the female element, prompts us that Venus is a product of a specific sexual union in which a dis-member-ed male body joins the formlessness, chaos, the *chora* of the female. Hesiod: "The genitalia themselves, freshly cut with flint, were thrown/ Clear of the mainland into the restless, white-capped sea,/ Where they floated a long time. A white foam from the god-flesh/ Collected around them, and in that foam a maiden developed/ And grew. . . ." But the birth of Aphrodite, despite its mildness well caught both by Boticelli in his flowery figures and by Hesiod in whose text "Tender grass sprouted up under her slender feet," repeats the scene of the primeval violence: if Kronos wants to liberate the mother from the monstrous pregnancy of the children pushed again and again back inside her womb, if he wants to free her from the torture of the penis ("The symbolic equation, penis = child"[6]), then Aphrodite rising in Boticelli's painting out of an open shell (itself a symbol of the female sex organ) is nothing else but a reconstitution of the penis previously cut off by Kronos's "jagged sickle": "The woman is a penis. 'The symbolic equation, Girl = Phallus'. Aphrodite, the personification of femininity, is just a penis, a penis cut off and tossed into the sea; the penis which Father Sky lost in intercourse with Mother Earth."[7]

5.

One should not forget the shell which not only speaks on behalf of the feminine sexuality and its dangers ("crab woman with immense claws, or a giant bivalvular mollusk, clam, which when opened resembles the female genital organ, and which shuts to devour"[8]) but also reintroduces the motif of the cave. Aphrodite rising out of the open shell signifies the opening Kronos wanted to achieve for his mother and her children – to bring them out of the cave of her womb and to liberate her from the burden of the child/penis ("The child is hollowing out a cave for himself inside his mother's body"[9]). What Blake describes in *Milton* as "a cavernous Earth of labyrinthine intricacy"[10] is nothing else but the body of Mother Earth from which we must emerge in the trauma of birth which is synonymous with the trauma of, at least, temporary blinding. Do not let us forget that Hesiod qualifies as an "awful thing to do" the act of condemning children to the darkness of the womb, and thus Aphrodite who results from the process of castration and reconstitution of the penis must remain in a vital relationship with light. *The erotic, she will become the goddess of, is then a desire to see, which however*

[6] N. O. Brown, *Love's Body*, p. 62.
[7] Ibid., p. 62.
[8] Ibid., p. 43.
[9] Ibid., p. 37.
[10] W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 498.

must remain linked with a temporary blindness caused by a sudden reemergence unto light. When we speak about the blindness of love, we remember this necessary lack of vision which constitutes the wisdom of desire, a radical dim-sightedness which does not deprive one of vision and knowledge but, on the contrary, makes them possible. Love tactics is out of necessity what Derrida describes as *tactique aveugle*, "a strategy without finality".[11] The opened shell speaks of the liberation from the closed cave (a story parallel to the Platonic tale told in *The Republic*) of the blocked vision, of the ophtalmological imperfections of, for instance, iridization and glaucoma, and also of the eye which opens due to the recognition of the fact that it is not enough to merely "see", but that seeing implies a necessary suspension of visual perception, a blindness which introduces man into a new vision. To speak about the erotic must involve then a discussion of the eye and its momentary and ineluctable blindness.

6.

The opening of the shell is not only a renewal of the eye which sees through its blindness but also of the ear (Blake in "Milton": "The Ear a little shell, in small volutions shutting out/ All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony"[12]). The erotic which, as we have seen in Hesiod's tale, is always twisted together with suffering and pain, sketches a certain trajectory of human actions which leads man away from the principles of what Blake calls "Moral Law". *The specificity of the erotic and its divinity seems to lie in their rejection of being contained in one scenario and one proper name and*, as we shall see, *in the denial of prayer as the only appropriate form of addressing God*. Hesiod senses this and stresses the semantic variety and indeterminateness of Aphrodite which despite one generic name always assumes names derived either from a specific geographic location (the erotic thwarts the effort towards generalization, there can be no general science of the erotic which is always "local") or from the amorous anatomy in which she delights (the reluctance of the erotic towards the general is so powerful that it even obliterates the universality of the body and speaks on behalf of its parts): "Aphrodite is her name in speech human and divine, since it was in foam/ She was nourished. But she also called Kythereia since/ She reached Kythera, and Kyprogenes because she was born/ On the surf-line of Kypros, and Philommedes because she loves/ The organs of sex, from which she made her epiphany." *Deconstruction as an erotic activity*: "At least help me so that death comes to us only from us. Do not give in to generality."[13]

[11] J. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, tr. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 135.

[12] W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 484.

[13] J. Derrida, *The Post Card. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, tr. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 118.

7.

The "epiphany" (i.e. the disclosure, incarnation, light) of the erotic thus seemingly takes place in a specialized anatomic organ ("the organs of sex"), but we should not believe that Aphrodite is the goddess of sexuality limited merely to the exchange of functions of specific physiological instruments. *Sexuality in the erotic is not synonymous with genitality* (one could ask here whether or not this is precisely what distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic, and to what extent Kronos's "jagged sickle" pruning his father's genitals is a suggestion that the erotic does not confine itself to the genital – a hint already present in Hesiod reference to Ouranos as "lecherous" – but overcomes the determinateness of anatomic functions). The "epiphany" stems from the "organs of sex", but at same time it relates to the organs of seeing and hearing. *The tale of the erotic narrates the project of man's fundamental disobedience and releasement from the confines of the autocratic principle* (Blake's "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression"[14]) *which regulates man's behaviour by uniform rules transferrable from one circumstance to another.*

To be consistent, the erotic as the untransferrability and particularization of ethical principles must then transgress against the limitations of sexuality to the "organs of sex". In other words, the erotic and Aphrodite as its goddess spell the ethics of radical contextuality; the erotic is man's utmost responsibility for his/her actions carried not on behalf of the abstract, general principle but in the name of each minute, particularized situation.

The terminology is evidently Blakean. Starting from the conviction that "Every Man's Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality", Blake consistently develops a theory which links the erotic with (a) the attack upon the "Moral Virtue", (b) the postulate of a necessary refashioning of perception through the opening of the "shell" of sense organs, and (c) a critique of virginity which allows Blake to emphasize that the erotic is not limited to the sexual. Thus we read in "Milton": "The Eye of Man a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark,/ Scarcely beholding the great light, conversing with the Void;/ The Ear a little shell, in small volutions shutting out/ All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony;/ The Tongue a little moisture fills, a little food it cloys,/ A little sound it utters & its cries are faintly heard,/ Then brings forth Moral Virtue the cruel Virgin of Babylon."[15]

The erotic, the nakedness of Venus, is implicated in what goes beyond the sexual and what can be understood as the civil beauty or *honestas* and what is representable in the image of androgyne: "that civil beauty that was possessed by Apollo, Bacchus, Ganymede, Bellerophon, Theseus, and other heroes, and perhaps on their account Venus was imagined as male".[16] This could also be one

[14] W. Blake, "Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 158.
[15] W. Blake, *Milton*, in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 484.
[16] G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 203.

of Venus's tricks, and we should not forget that Sappho refers to Aphrodite as to a "weaver of tricks" which allows for a connection between the goddess and Hermes; Aphrodite is a divinity which tends a trick of understanding, and understanding as a trick and an act of thievery. As Norman O. Brown instructs us, "A lover might invoke Aphrodite 'weaver of tricks' or Hermes the Trickster. In fact, Hermes and Aphrodite were frequently associated in ritual, and even combined in a figure of Hermaphroditus."[17]

8.

With this we return to the motif of the cave. A liberation from the tyranny of the genital father bespeaks of a rejection of the prevalance of the sexual and seductive (the two form an inseparable pair) over the erotic; in the sphere of the erotic one can detect male mothers and vaginal fathers. Kronos kills his father in order to bring to life, to give birth to, to "mother" his brothers and sisters; Aphrodite, who originates from the act of castration, rises erect, like *rex erectus*, thus becoming the figure of both attributes of patriarchy: the phallus and royal power ("His Royal Highness; his whole body a penis, erect; his whole person a sublimation of a male member. . ."[18]). Aphrodite wants to open the sphere in which we could be properly born, emerge from the cave, and where the cave, while certainly alluding to the female topography of sex, would not dominate the scene; in a word, *Aphrodite belongs to the world where sexuality is not only not limited to the genital, but where its drama takes place even before the sexual.* This is the realm of the erotic, i.e. in Blake's terms – the condition of sexuality in eternity, sexuality liberated from the constraints of the Urizenic "One King, One God, One Law",[19] the sexual union free from the restrictiveness of marriage vows ("In Eternity they neither marry nor are given away in marriage"[20]). Aphrodite rising into a mild Meditteranean light from the open shell announces the termination of gestation, the escape from a cave, that is to say from war and death. As Blake says of Vala, his goddess of nature: "Why have thou elevated inward. . . ./ From grotto & cave beneath the Moon, dim region of death/ Where I laid my Plow in the hot noon, where my hot team fed,/ Where implements of War are forged, the Plow to go over the Nations,/ In pain girding me round like a rib of iron in heaven?"[21]

The power of Aphrodite, i.e. of the erotic, as a force which allows sexuality to function in the region before the sexual and the rigid laws regulating its practices become possible does not so much subvert the patriarchal society but goes beyond and *before it*. The erotic is not a deregulating potential of the orgy which

[17] N. O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief. The Evolution of a Myth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1947), p. 14.

[18] N. O. Brown, *Love's Body*, p. 134.

[19] W. Blake, "The First Book of Urizen", in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 224.

[20] W. Blake, "Jerusalem", in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 660.

[21] Ibid., p. 660.

violates all possible laws but a puissance which predates the regulation of the human society. Orgy is subversive precisely because it acts to destroy the moral law, but in order to do it it must constitute itself a certain system, some counter-law, and anti-discipline which obviously implies that the orgy is not a manifestation of anarchic freedom but an actualization of a scenario: "The orgy is organized, distributed, ordered and supervised like a studio sitting; its profitability is of the assembly line."[22] Thus the erotic does not have to indulge in the stereotypical and necessary practices of a subversive and illegal power – it does not have to hide and conspire. Just the opposite, it does not recognize the law not because it wants to threaten it, but because it is a vigour which makes law possible and in its dynamism it is not restricted by principles and rules. Hence, Boticelli's Aphrodite looks in an unspecified direction, her hand does not point upwards to indicate the directionality of truth (like in a later painting *Apelles's Slander*), neither does she hold any attributes of the feminine (like a stunning Eve in Jan and Hubert van Eyck's *The Altar of the Mystical Lamb* which, herself sensuous and beautiful, holds up a wrinkled and withered apple which narrates a story diametrically different than that which we are being told by the body).

The erotic of Aphrodite does not need the concealment of the cave and conspiratorial system of transgressive actions like those which developed much later and were directed against the paternalistic principles of the father-God. Nothing is further from the erotic and Aphrodite than the orgiastic and the recondite and arcane. Aphrodite does not represent the mother, but a force which is older than the mother and which can wean us from the motherly domain. "Every relapse to the veneration of the mother, which can only be accomplished sexually, is therefore antisocial and is persecuted with all the horror of the so-called religious fanaticism. But this. . .finally results in the preservation and strengthening of the father-like power for the protection of the social community. . .The best known movement of this kind is the pseudo-messianic period of the 'Schabattianians', about 300 hundred years ago. . . In caves in the neighbourhood of Salonika they organized the wildest orgies for religious purposes. At the beginning of the Sabbath they placed a naked virgin in their midst and likewise naked danced around her. Orgies were substituted for prayer. . .Naturally they were most severely persecuted by the Rabbis."[23]

9.

If it is true, as Otto Rank maintains about Plato, that "the cave is not merely 'a womb phantasy', but it gives us a deep insight into the mind of the philosopher, who experienced Eros driving everything onwards as a yearning for the return into the primal state",[24] then we must interpret Aphrodite's emergence from the

[22] R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, tr. R. Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 125.
[23] O. Rank, *The Trauma of Birth* (New York: Harper Books, 1973), p. 127.
[24] Ibid., p. 174.

foam as the epiphany of the power which precedes law as well as prayer. *The erotic: a prayerless prayer, a lawless law. There can be no law of the erotic, and therefore – since law necessarily must begin with a fact the story of which it is trying to reconstruct and verify – one cannot think of a narrative of the erotic, a coherent tale in which events would be organized along the cause-and-effect pattern.* Language does not seem to be a horizon of the erotic; just the opposite, the prayerless prayer of and to Aphrodite must involve a pulverization of language since one cannot articulately address the goddess who is shown by Boticelli in the human form but also a product of the sea, a pearl contained in a shell like, two hundred years later, mussels and mollusks represented by Dutch masters. Aphrodite lives as a human only to the extent to which she conceals and continues to live the life of what is pre- and non-human; caught in the moment at which she has left her animality (a crustacean kind of being) having metamorphosed into a beautiful feminine body she both carries a memory of that older form (one may wonder whether this remembrance is not to be read in the tales of divine sodomy in which Zeus in the disguise of a bull makes love to Europa, as a swan approaches Leda, not to mention a scandalous narrative about Pasiphae and her bovine amorous adventure; Vico notices carefully that the licentiousness of gods is disruptive even of the very "orderliness" of the orgy in that it defies any limitations and recognizes no laws: "Nor is this unrestrained licentiousness of the gods satisfied by forbidden intercourse with women: Jove burns with wicked love for Ganymede; indeed this lust reaches the point of bestiality and Jove, transformed into a swan, lies with Leda"[25]) and makes us think about the metamorphoses to come. *One cannot experience the erotic* (unlike the seductive) *on a merely human level; to know the erotic must imply a desperate knowledge about the constraints and pretences of the articulate discourse.* One prays to Aphrodite in grunts and moanings. "Man certainly began praying long before he knew how to speak, for the pangs he must have suffered upon leaving animality, upon denying it, could not have been endured without grunts and groans, prefigurations, premonitory signs of prayer."[26]

10.

The "epiphany" of Aphrodite is then doubly paradoxical. It takes place in the realm of the genitals but evidently does not want to be limited to it; it delineates the divine provenance of the erotic but turns away from the orthodoxy. If one of the senses of the term "epiphany" is a revelation of the Law, we will have to admit that the erotic reveals the Law only to denounce it. It the same way as Kronos (who is indirectly responsible for the birth of Aphrodite) radically conspires and rebels against the patriarchal authority and its Law which eventually turns out to address the notion of property and inheritance ("The dispute between fathers and

[25] G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 43.

[26] E. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 169.

sons is over property. In. . .patriarchal system paternal power is a property which is inherited and which consists in having property in one's own children"[27]), Aphrodite disrupts the traditional order of the feminine: her birth of the sea-foam both confirms and denies the role of the womb, the shell which in Boticelli's masterpiece discloses and carries to a shore her beautiful naked body simultaneously represents the closure of the womb and speaks of its ultimate openness. Kronos wants to explode the narrow sphere of the paternal authority; Aphrodite subverts and expands the "Female Space". Both actions aim at achieving *what is central for the erotic – the problematization of selfhood.*

Blake sees clearly both the male patriarchal oppression of the law ("He [Satan] created Seven Deadly Sins, drawing out his infernal scroll/ Of Moral laws and cruel punishments. . . ."[28]) and the limitations of the stereotypical female role developed by the philosophy of the family ("The nature of the Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs/ Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite"[29]) and attributes both to the operations of the self ("Satan, making to himself Laws from his own identity", "I in my Selfhood am that Satan", "I [Satan] have brought them [laws] from the uppermost innermost recesses of my Eternal Mind"[30]).

11.

To speak of the erotic is then to proclaim and practice a radical birth which could free man both from the regressive disposition towards the womb of unity without condemning him/her to the confinement of the self. On the one hand, there is Plato and his philosophy where Eros is the force responsible for the striving towards the originary union; on the other hand, a long line of philosophers, from Aristotle through Descartes to Kant, wishes to promulgate a separation between the self and the word. ". . .the neo-Platonists and their successors completely succeeded. . .in realizing that striving for union with their origin which was so poetically formulated in their Founder's philosophy of Eros. As a reaction to it appears modern philosophy which. . .took its point of departure from the discovery of man as a part of Nature and sought intellectually to deny and to abolish his separation from it."[31] The open shell which carries Aphrodite to the shores of Kypros is then a breaking up of the nostalgic drive towards the one which the erotic radically undermines as well as a cracking of the shell of selfhood: "And the shellfishness of selfishness is the reluctance to be born."[32] Boticelli's Aphrodite does not belong either to the sea (she has almost landed on a beach) or to the ground (precisely because of the fact that she has only "almost", i.e. not quite, landed);

[27] N. O. Brown, *Love's Body*, p. 6.
[28] W. Blake, *Milton*, in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 489.
[29] Ibid., p. 490.
[30] Ibid., pp. 490, 491, 496.
[31] O. Rank, *The Trauma of Birth* (New York: Harper Book, 1973), p. 177.
[32] N. O. Brown, *Love's Body*, p. 44.

suspended between the air and its divine patrons and the land with its protective coat she can display her nakedness which does not result from the rejection of garment but which dates back to before the invention and necessity of clothing and become the goddess of flowers which, however, are not rooted in the soil in the same way as the goddess herself is not rooted in and domesticated by any enclosed space. One should never tire of emphasizing the openness of the shell and of the naked body rising against the light blue sky: this conspicuous ascendance filling our eyes speaks doubly against the conventional images of the feminine. First, because of the innocence of the nakedness in question, nakedness which mocks and transcends the demands of modesty; second, because this radical visibility leaves behind a whole cluster of symbols and images which connect the woman with what is covert and hidden, with the subterraneous cave, i.e. with the inauthentic morality of oppression and guilt as well as with the establishment of institutionalized religion. Thus Blake in "Jerusalem" turns to the "Female Will" as to a power which hides "the most evident God in a hidden covert, even/ In the shadows of a Woman & a secluded Holy Place. . ./ Hidden among the Dead & mured up from the paths of life".[33] We should also remember Bataille's categorical claim according to which "there is in fact no human pleasure without some irregularity in its circumstances, without the breaking of an interdiction – the simplest, and the most powerful of which, is currently that of nudity".[34]

Aphrodite and the erotic belong to the realm of the non-human: they always deal with the radical birth to the time before selfhood, i.e. before man ("O to have been born before man!"[35]). One should remember a unique story of Cupid's origin told by Sir Philip Sidney, a narrative which piles one transgression upon another. First, there is Zeus betraying his wife, Hera, with Io, who is transformed into a cow and guarded by Argus. Then Argus proves his lack of loyalty by assulting Io who gives birth to Cupid: "By Argus got on Io, then a cow /. . ./ Mercury kille'd his [Jove's] false sire for this act;/ His dam, a beast, was pardon'd beastly fact." Continuing his tale Sidney gives us a description of Cupid very different from ones which traditionally focus on the boyish beauty of his appearance and recklessness of behaviour; before Cupid is transformed into a fat and harmless putto, he is a Dionysian, sylenian figure combining his role as a trickster ("To lie, to steal, to pry, and to accuse,/ Naught in himself, each other to abuse") with the solemnity of the transgressive wisdom: "Yet bears he still his parents' stately gifts,/ A horned head, cloven feet, and thousand eyes/ Some gazing still, some winking wily shifts,/ With long large ears where never rumour dies./ His horned head doth seem the heaven to spite,/ His cloven foot doth never tread aright."[36] When we are thinking the erotic, the non-human, or "formless" is never far away. "'Formless' is pre-

[33] W. Blake, *Jerusalem*, in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 660.

[34] G. Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice", *Yale French Studies*, No. 78 (1990), p. 23.

[35] E. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 52.

[36] P. Sidney, "Cupid", in *Silver Poets of the 16th Century*, ed. G. Bullett (New York: Everyman, 1966), pp. 245–246.

cisely that which is beyond the limits, which has no term, and which exceeds definition. To give it a meaning would not be to take its meaning seriously, to make the word redundant. . .'Formless' destabilizes the very idea of definition by refusing. . .to give a finite meaning to the word."[37]

12.

We will be able to appreciate this anarchic freedom of Boticelli's Aphrodite if we set his painting vis à vis Noel-Nicolas Coypel's 1732 version of the same scene where the goddess is shown also in a conch of a shell, but the whole setting brings us to a very different truth of the divinity. What is ontologically ascetic in Boticelli (Aphrodite as a sheer emergence of the power of the erotic, a force which defies determinations and dychotomies of the mortals; one should also note the almost empty, monotonous background of the painting which resembles Baudrillard's "desert vision"[38]), in Coypel's work is refashioned in such a manner that the goddess is defined in terms of the ontic entanglement with the mortal world: the shell no longer carries it from the chaos of the night journey towards the ultimate birth but serves merely as an elaborate support (one should particulary note a back part of the shell wrought and carved as carefully as if it were a piece of fashionable furniture) for her body which instead of being Hesiod's "epiphany" of Being and Blake's enlargement of the "Female Space" is already preoccuppied with the stereotypical feminine operations of coquettery and flirtation augmented additionally by the frolic of the goddess's entourage of naiads and tritons. In fact, the shell is no longer carried by waves, the goddes does not belong to the realm of elemental ontological creation but instead is provided with all the paraphernalia of the social game of domination and power: the shell is carried, like a sedan chair, by the tritons and naiads who bear all the semblance of servants, the body of the goddes no longer frontally confronts the viewer with the ascetism of nakedness but, partly wrapped, in a white sheet (which itself is an announcement of what will soon become a game of lingerie, of the semi-pornographic theatre of silk brassiere and garter with which the erotic has nothing to do) is already caught in the artfulness of the sexual/seductive diplomacy in which the eye, hair, and jewelry play most important roles. The combination of the denial of fronting and clothing marks a beginning towards the orgiastic and pornographic which will eventually bring about a destruction of the woman and its replacement by a feminine automaton: "Woman is destroyed: she is wrapped up, twisted about, veiled, disguised so as to erase every trace of her anterior features (figure, breasts, sexual organs); a kind of surgical and functional doll is produced, a body *without a front part*. . ., a monstrous bandage, a *thing*."[39]

[37] J. Strauss, "The Inverted Icarus", *Yale French Studies*, No. 78 (1990), p. 116.

[38] J. Baudrillard, *America*.

[39] R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 123.

All three elements (the eye, hair, and jewelry) meet in the triangular space demarcated by the goddess's head, her right shoulder, and left hand. The hair is no longer exposed to the wind as in Boticelli's painting in which the long tresses of Aphrodite play with the gusts of the breath of the two wind gods. Coypel's Venus has already subjected her hair to the elaborate treatment which combines coiffure with adornment: the hair is not only combed and plaited but also kept in order by a string of pearls the other end of which the goddes is holding in her left hand. Jewerly constitutes an important feature of the painting not only because we can see another supply of pearls and precious stones held by a triton in the lower left corner of the canvas but, first of all, because it is jewerly that marks a distinction between the goddess and her entourage. The authority of the erotic is marked by a double sign of power: first, by the dominating placing of Venus carried by her semi-divine servants; second, by the goddess's relationship with property – it is only her body that is embellished with the regalia of chiffon, coiffure, and bijouterie (one should also note that the flowers which in Boticelli are painted in the state of awkward freedom and independence, in Coypel appear as already combined in wreaths or flower lines thus totally subjected to the purposes of human aesthetics). The body of Coypel's Venus has been culturally re-written. What in Boticelli belongs to ontology, in Coypel represents the entanglement of the erotic in economy which turns the former into a mere sexual/seductive stratagem in which the insignia of royal power and property play the essential role. *Cosmology of Boticelli has been replaced by the cosmetology of Coypel* (we have no time to pursue this topic here, but one could certainly write an interesting analysis of the two faces: Boticelli's Venus's natural and tanned with wind and sunshine, and Coypel's goddess's which is an arena of scented soap, powder, rouge, and perfume).

13.

The directionality of the drama displayed in the two works is also radically different. Boticelli represents his goddess in a movement which brings her towards the viewer from the depth of space rather than from the unfathomable chasm of the sea: Aphrodite approaches the shore which is fundamental not only to emphasize the fact that the erotic belongs to the sphere of the ground, i.e. to the realm of the human, but also to point at the boundary character of the experience of the erotic. Aphrodite is where the male (the cut off penis) and female (the womb of the sea) come together and where the sea fronts the land: there can be no true experience of the erotic which would belong to exclusively one of these categories. The erotic names this impossible sphere where one remains always as the "approaching one", as "coming" (one should also hear the sexual echo in this word) to the shore without either returning to the open sea or finally landing in a safe port.

Coypel plays out his version of the drama vertically: the goddess is lifted up (let us note the passive voice which indicates that the work is being done by

somebody else rather than by the divinity herself) and then remains suspended in between the sea and the air. Both spheres however are clearly distant from the shore and therefore banned for the mortals. Venus in Coypel's reading does not involve the necessary openness to and readiness for the other, particularly if the other was to be mortal; rather, she remains locked in the triumph of the divine to which the perishable does not have any access (this unreadiness for the other is also linked with a turning away from Boticelli's Venus's askesis: "Askesis. . .is addressed to the other. . ."[40]). Coypel's Venus reminds man of his mortality, and it is this awareness which separates man from the erotic and turns the erotic itself unto a path which will lead it closer and closer towards becoming seduction. It is in the realm of the seductive that man must remember his "role", must know his "place" and stick to who he "is" in order to continue the game; the erotic, on the other hand, calls for a radical forgetfulness, for "forgetting oneself" not only in a sense of losing one's constraints and inhibitions but, more importantly, in a sense of not remembering that one has given oneself as a gift to the other. "When man forgets he is mortal, he feels inclined to do great things, and sometimes succeeds. This oblivion, a fruit of excess, is at the same time a cause of his woes."[41] It is this oblivion which brings us to the problematic of the gift: "For there to be a gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also forget it right away and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytic categoriality of forgetting."[42]

The sea belongs to water deities, the air is filled with puttos who do not even carry their traditional bows and arrows, signals that love does involve the other and is frequently inextricably linked with wounding and suffering: Venus does not belong to the realm of the shore where the other is dramatically confronted but to the territory of her own power which attracts the other only to repel him in the moment of a supreme reconfirmation of one's own force. This is clearly indicated by the gaze which is a peculiar blend of the narcissistic glance at herself (Venus's eyes are directed towards the pearl string which she holds in her left hand) and the anticipatory look which takes in the value of the embellishment but wants to recognize it as a possible vehicle to be used when an other appears in view. In this space where embellishment plays such an important role, and we will see that soon it will become all, in this space of seduction ("highly seductive spaces where meaning, at these height of luxury, has finally become adornment"[43]) a man is involved in a trap of the self, whereas in Boticelli we deal with man's liberation from the shell of self, the "dried shells that the fish have quite forsaken".[44]

[40] R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, tr. R. Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p. 33.

[41] E. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 165.

[42] J. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, tr. P. Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 26.

[43] J. Baudrillard, *America*, p. 124.

[44] W. Blake, "Vala or the Four Zoas", in W. Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 296.

14.

Coypel's Venus, *unlike Boticelli's whose look does not concentrate on the goddess herself or on her vision of the future events but, rather, wanders off towards some nondefinable space as if to say that the other will come when he/she is ready to come, when time allows for the encounter and finds for it its proper measure thus teaching us that the other cannot be anticipated but must arrive only as a gift* (we have no time to develop this important philosophical issue at the moment), *that the other comes only in his/her time which will never remain under my dictate, to repeat – Coypel's Venus fulfills herself in anticipation, in the tantalizing expectancy of the frivolous and seductive.* Boticelli's Aphrodite does not expect anything, her sex is modestly hidden by her hair; she represents the power of the erotic, i.e. of accepting and sheltering what comes, of fronting the world with the look which, like the glance of Rossetti's *Astarte Syriaca*, comes from the "absolute eyes that wean/ The pulse of hearts to the sphere's dominant tune"[45]. The anticipation of Coypel's goddess sealed hermetically off in the world of divinities can bring about nothing but alienation which we find in Tennyson's *Mariana* and her refrain, "My life is dreary,/ He cometh not."[46]

If Boticelli's Aphrodite presents the erotic as an open territory of fundamental loneliness which the other enters at a moment which will not be at my discretion or will to determine (unlike in seduction where in the elaborate and well-rehearsed scenario I always try to make the other arrive at "my" time, when and where I will), if then the erotic must signify a certain radical danger (even if we limit ourselves to Plato we will see that there "Eros is the pain wherewith the Demon . . . reclaims the lost Paradise of his pure and original Being",[47] but the *pain and danger in question are even greater because, as we have been trying to demonstrate, the erotic is precisely the fronting of the fact that no retrieval of the "pure and original Being" is conceivable and yet despite this diagnosis and warning we must try, and this trying is what we call here the erotic*), Coypel's Venus knows the danger of the cosmetics. We should carefully mark the rouge spots on Venus's cheeks, as it is through and in them that the danger of mortality invades the otherwise hermetic world of divinities: "From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century an artificial pink and white face was the fashion. It was produced by the combination of ceruse (the poisonous white lead) and ochre rouge, painted over with egg white or some other lacques to create what would seem to us a grotesquely artificial appearance. Despite the dangers of lead, its use persisted until revolutionary romanticism made it unfashionable."[48]

[45] D. G. Rossetti, "Astarte Syriaca", in L. Trilling, H. Bloom (eds.), *Victorian Poetry and Prose* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), in the section "Victorian Narrative Painting" between pp. 400–401.

[46] Ibid., p. 396.

[47] O. Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, p. 173.

[48] E. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p. 108.

15.

And, to close this preface which tries to hint that the erotic is that force which allows us to get to the sur-face, to the pre-face, i.e. to notice the face before it will inevitably be covered up by te cosmetics of the sexual/seductive, let us only very briefly observe a continuation of the trajectory of the development of Aphrodite from Homer through Boticelli to Coypel. The next step is reached when the body does not open itself in its nakedness (and let us add quickly, in its loneliness, or rather in its nakedness being suspended between the sky, sea and earth) allowing the event of the erotic to occur (like in Boticelli and the strange look of his goddess), or when it turns the erotic into the seductive by various techniques of teasing and the gaze which furtively invites and anticipates the other confirming one's own unsharable potential (sexuality as an imposition rather than a gift, like in Coypel's painting), but when the body, always surrounded by other bodies, concentrates upon itself *and simultaneously* looks directly at the other who is no longer anticipated (like in Coypel) but who is already here and yet cannot do anything else but merely observe or worship the body. In the first situation the body is naked and open towards the other, in the second it is (partly) dressed and unavailable, in the third it is undressed and unavailable.

François Boucher's *The Toilet of Venus* painted in the 1740s provides us with an excellent example. First of all, what was already signalled by Coypel's move towards the semiotics of power and embellishment reaches here its ultimate stage: no longer do we deal with the "natural" scene of birth but only with a totally cultured scenario of investiture. The goddess has nothing to do with the sphere of the productivity of becoming; she is already a late comer to a world where one does not concern oneself with the primal violence (Boticelli and Hesiod's story of the castration of Ouranos) but where one indulges in the pleasures of the social stratagems of seduction in which the sphere of the divine is reduced to a mere symbolic representation. This is what differentiates Boucher's painting from Coypel's Venus: whereas in the latter seductivity is inscribed in the world of divinities, the former deals with the licentiousness which is carefully prepared not as a revelation (Hesiod's "epiphany") but as a public spectacle of nakedness. *The erotic demands radical loneliness which results from and which supports a prayerless prayer to the divinities of the elemental forces; the seductive uses the sacred merely as a quotation and stylistic reference* (cupids, white doves) *and is inevitably linked with the spectacular*. In the realm of seduction the body becomes an actor; first, because it is involved in the spectacle of dress which hides the physical body in order to allow the public to dream about it ("In the capitalist West. . .dress always hints at the secret, hidden body"[49]), second, because the word itself is representable as a performance or, at least, a certain narrative ("'You see me completely naked,' Eugenie says to her professor, 'dissertate on me as much as you want'"[50]).

[49] Ibid., p. 96.

[50] R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 159.

The first element is noticeable already in Coypel's work in which Venus is partly covered with a delicate white sheet; the other is emphasized by Boucher in whose painting two puttos are drawing a heavy curtain which could be used either as a backdrop, a mis-en-scene for further action or, if need be, as a screen behind which the acting bodies can hide some of their operations.

The drama depicted by Boucher is similar in many ways to the scene painted by Coypel: the same accentuation of property and embellishment, the same architectural details of luxury and wealth with a marked topographical shift (a chariot which Coypel placed in the sky, Boucher appropriately brings to the ground, a richly carved element no longer forms a back of the shell but supports a heavy wooden console, a singular string of pearls has been replaced by a jewerly box, naiadas have transformed into chamber maids). Where the two artists part their ways is the mystery of the gaze. In Coypel we have found the narcissistic-anticipatory look which informed the other about the presence of my body which I myself have found attractive. The relationship between the body and the other remains however unconsummated since the former is locked in the sphere where the mortal other cannot enter. The body is attractive but forbidden. This is an opening through which the seductive slips in and which already rules in Boucher. Unlike Boticelli's *Venus* who look towards some unspecified other without focusing her glance upon herself (*she is, so to speak, absent to herself, forgetful about herself, which is a first step to think of the erotic as of a gift suggested in the mystery of her look which is directed at somebody and yet not at anybody specific as if such a precise address of the gaze would already imply necessity of memory and thus erased the very possibility of the gift to occur*), unlike Coypel's goddess who has seen herself but has not preserved her image as a possible substitution for her own body, as a dream of her which she will allow the other to dream, Boucher's Venus looks at the other and simultaneously offers him her own image.

A double look in Boucher's painting is particularly interesting because it has not been presented to us as a direct eye contact of the body with its mirror reflection (like in Velazquez's *Venus and Amor*), it is not an act either of a reconfirmation of one's beauty or of narcissistic vanity. The image in the mirror is precisely an "image", more a painting than a reflection, it offers a glimpse of Venus's face and upper part of her torso caught as if against her will and decision. The goddess looks at the other not with anticipation, the other has already arrived (it is not a coincidence that the scene is located in a topography which still evokes the shore but simultaneously has nothing to do with Boticelli's primeval shore where the foam of the sea and slime of life are one; the shore has been transformed into a marble-paved bank of a pool or a luxurious bathtub, we have left the scenery of the original baptism to enter the space of cleansing and cleaning of deodorization and sanitation where the body slowly loses its quality (its smell and natural colouring, but does not losing one's smell imply also severing a vital relationship with our own mortality, with our own death working its way through us and leaving us its scent; when Americans indulge in the orgy of deodorants they really want to mislead death and put it off its track. Cioran is right

in his claim that "man gives off a special odor: of all the animals, he alone smells of the corpse"[51]) and becomes its own image. The space of dangerous seduction ("We read of voluptuous baths in the dwelling of Circe"[52]) which in addition turns us back towards the regressive nostalgia of the cave, this time a cave purified, deodorized, sanitized ("Arabian incense used to perfume the grotto of Venus"[53]). What remains when the body becomes sterile is its image and the relationship with the other comes within the orbit of the economy of absence and substitution: you cannot have my body, even if you have already arrived in its immediate proximity, the only thing you are enitled to is the image of the body. The promiscuity of the image has replaced the askesis of contact. The body, the domain of the erotic, is what you have been excluded from: "The image is presented, pure and distinct as a letter: it is the letter of what pains me. . .I am excluded from it as from the primal scene, which may exist insofar as it is framed within the contour of the keyhole. Here then. . .is the definition of the image: that from which I am excluded."[54] The seductiveness of the body (in Coypel) is replaced by the seductiveness of the simulacrum (Boucher).

Tadeusz Rachwał and *Tadeusz Sławek*

[51] E. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 208.
[52] G. Vico, *The New Science*, p. 306.
[53] Ibid., p. 306.
[54] R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. . .*, p. 132.

Fig. 1. Noel Nicolas Coypel, *The Birth of Venus* (1732), in *Five Hundred Years of French Painting 15th to 18th Centuries* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1990)

Fig. 2. François Boucher, *The Toilet of Venus* (early 1740s), in *Five Hundred Years of French Painting 15th to 18th Centuries* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1990)

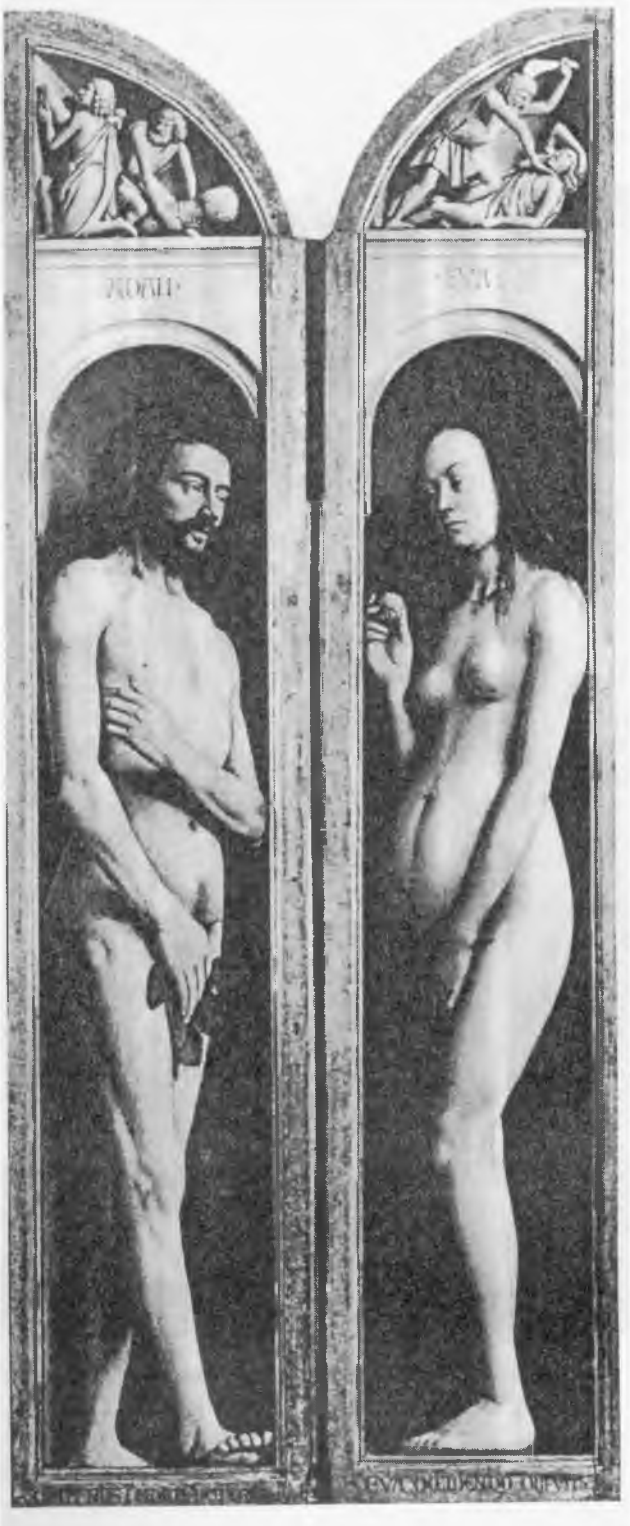

Fig. 3. *Adam* and *Eve*, details of *The Ghent Altarpiece*, left and right wings, in H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Marry Abrams, 1986)

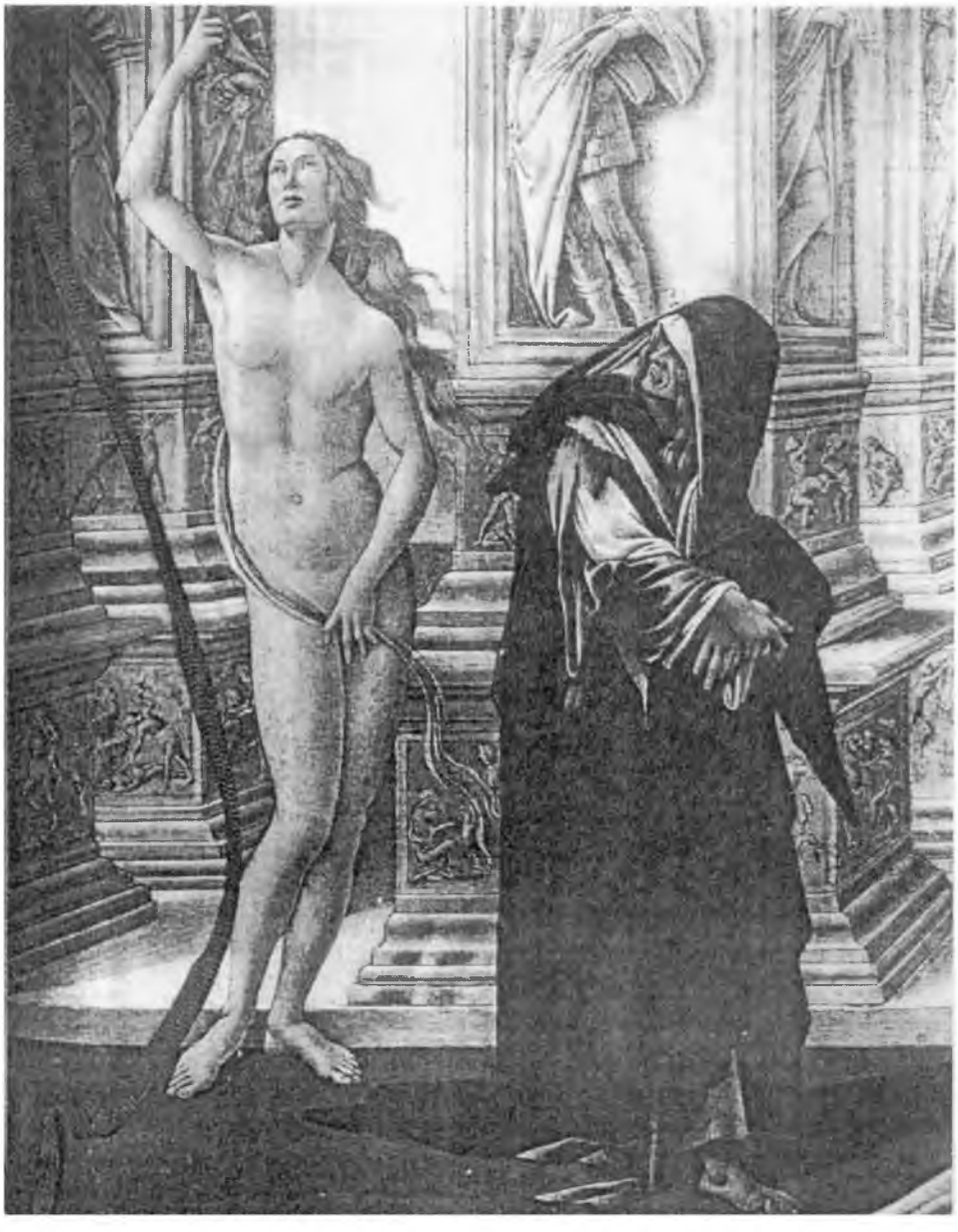

Fig. 4. Sandro Botticelli, *Apelles' Slander: Truth and Remorse* (ca. 1494), in A. Malraux, *Nierzeczywiste* (Warszawa: KAW, 1985)

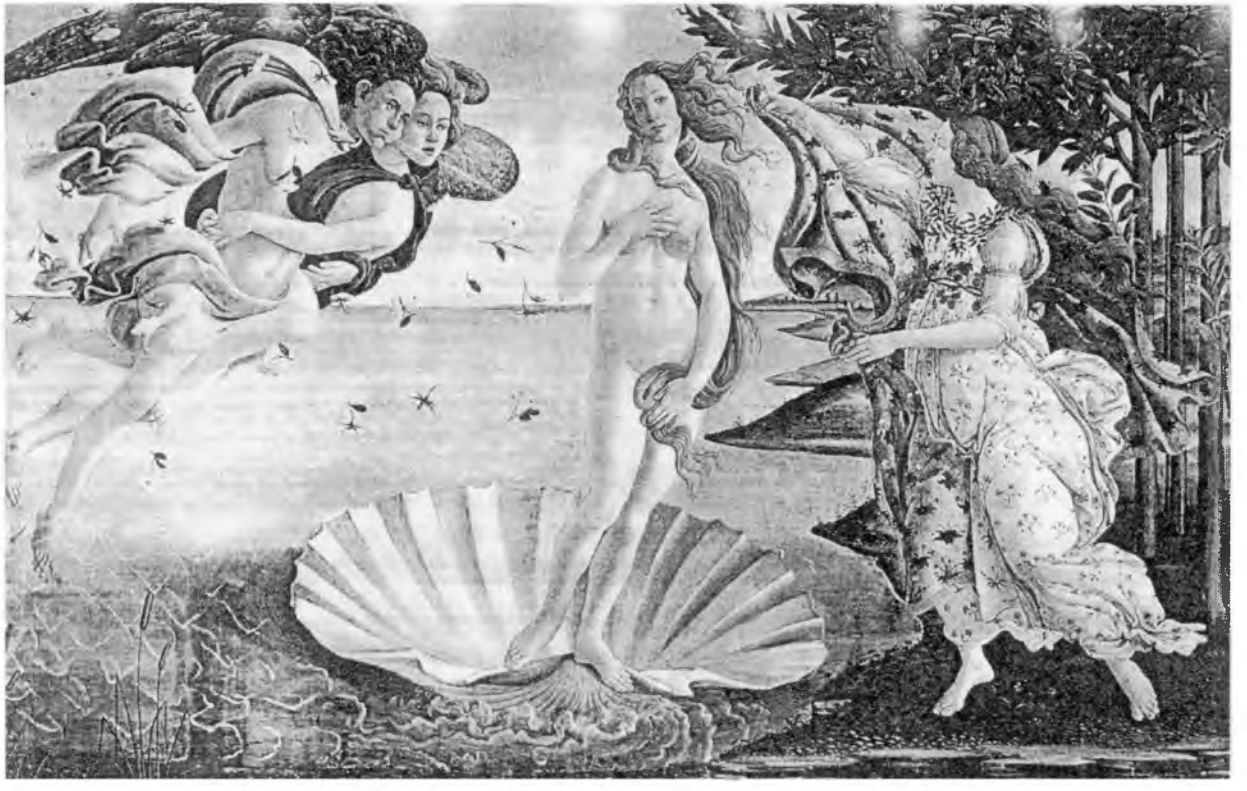

Fig. 5. Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, in H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Marry Abrams, 1986)

Andrzej Wicher

Sounding the Limits of Eroticism in Chaucer's "The Prioress's Tale"

For love is blynd alday, and may nat see
The Merchant's Tale, l. 354
Ful sooth is seyd that love ne lordshipe
Wol noght, his thankes, have no felaweshipe.
The Knight's Tale, ll. 767–768
I am ever a-gast, for why men rede,
That "love is thing ay ful of bisy drede".
Troylus and Criseyde, bk. iv. ll. 1645–1646

Chaucer's writings abound in wise, or not so wise, sayings and proverbs concerning love, most of which have a very ancient pedigree. The best known case of this can be found in his "General Prologue to 'The Canterbury Tales'", where we encounter the refined Prioress, sporting a brooch with an inscription saying, *Amor vincit omnia* ("love conquers all"), which, as is equally well known, can be interpreted as either earthly or divine love. If we are to judge by the Prioress's, pious though clearly anti-Semitic tale, it is apparently the latter kind of love that she first of all had in mind. Her tale actually concerns a triumph of religious love over the malice of the Church's enemies, and, perhaps even more importantly, over the laws of nature, since the young hero of her tale goes on singing his devotional song dedicated to the Virgin in spite of having his throat cut by the "hateful" Jews. The boy's singing is also a triumph of his mother's love, as it is she who by her urgent searching, and by her crying and shouting, provokes, as it were, her little son to resume his singing, and thus to reveal himself to her:

but Jhesu of his grace
Yaf in hir thoght inwith a litel space
That in that place after hir sone she cryde,
Where he was casten in a pit bisyde.
"The Prioress's Tale", ll. 603–606[1]

[1] The quotations from Chaucer are based on: L. D. Benson (gen. ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The nature of love in the Prioress's tale is not, however, devoid of certain subtly erotic overtones which seem to correspond to the Prioress's ingeniously coquettish behaviour described in the "General Prologue". Love in her tale is of course meant not to be erotic, in the sense "carnal", and the narrator takes considerable pains to assure the readers that such indeed is the case. The boy ("a litle clergeon", i.e. a schoolboy) is only seven years old, and his innocence and virginity are strongly emphasised, particularly in the following fragment:

> O martir, sowded to virginitee,
> Now maystow syngen, folwynge evere in oon
> The white Lamb celestial – quod she –
> Of which the grette evaungelist, Seint John,
> In Pathmos wroot, which seith that they that goon
> Biforn this lamb and synge a song al newe,
> That nevere, flesshly, wommen they ne knewe.
> ll. 579–585

The boy's status of a martyr is clearly fixed, solidified, made fast, literally "welded" by his virginity, by the fact that "he never knew women fleshly", his mode of existence is seen as being on the opposite pole to the zone of the erotic, and yet, at the same time, its definition depends on the erotic. The latter is associated with everything transitory, changeable, and unreliable, or with blindness, wild anarchy, fear and uncertainty (as in the quotations adduced at the head of the present study) and functions as the most potent metaphor of those negative values, a metaphor that has to be evoked and denied if the reader is to believe seriously in the young martyr's sanctity.

The Prioress's impassioned exclamation has a slightly ironic aspect. We have just learnt that the child's throat has been cut, i.e. his wholeness – a word closely related to "holiness"[2] – has been ruthlessly violated, a sort of bloody rape has been committed, and then, as if to remedy on a different plane the harm done by the Jews, the Prioress tries to convince us that what, from a materialistic point of view, is a body nearly cut in two, spiritually speaking, is a perfect whole, "welded" together by the boy's inviolate virginity. And the problem of virginity, especially when it appears in the mouth of a religious woman of that time, is not very far from being a problem of life and death. As Chaucer's friend, John Gower wrote concerning the chastity of nuns in his Latin work, *Vox Clamantis*:

> O how the virginity which follows the Lamb through all the vaults in heaven shines above every glory ! Wedded to the Godhead, it is radiant on earth, forsaking the actions to which the nature of the human body prompts it. Just as the unchaste woman is fetid, the untainted chaste one is sweet-scented. The one possesses God, the other a corpse.[3]

[2] Cf. T. F. Hoad (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 219.

[3] R. P. Miller (ed.), *Chaucer – Sources and Backgrounds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 227.

Gower mentions also the taboo against raping a nun:

> Therefore it is not permitted for men to violate consecrated nuns, for the sacred veil carries the mark of chastity. How heavy a crime in our judgement does a man commit who takes it upon himself to violate another's bride ! But be assured that the man who destroys nunneries and takes it upon himself to violate the bride of God sins even more heavily.[4]

Gower surely does not mean that all nuns are, or even should be, virgins in the physiological sense of the word: "But no matter what woman seeks the cloister under the veil, the rule which she obeys will sanctify her."[5] It is the "sacred veil" itself that functions as an equivalent of the hymen, it gives a woman an artificial virginity which, however, or rather because of its artificiality, is hedged about with even more strict prohibitions than the real one. Also the violation of this kind of "super-virginity" is seen as far more pernicious in its results than an "ordinary" rape.

The hero's virginity in "The Prioress's Tale" is also a rather complicated affair. It is based of course on his "not knowing women fleshly", but there is an additional dimension to it that consists in his special relationship with the Holy Virgin, something that has much to do with "knowing women", while confirming and sublimating the boy's virginity. He is clearly obsessed with his devotion to the Virgin to the point of being immune to other women's charms. The song that he sings, *Alma Redemptoris Mater* ("Gracious mother of the Redeemer") and is never tired of singing, includes the word, *alma* which literally means "a female nourisher", or, in an adjectival sense, "life-giving", "bountiful".[6] It is exactly in the capacity of a nourisher, and a "life-giver" that the Virgin approaches her admirer after his throat has been slit and he is on the point of dying:

> "This welle of mercy, Cristes mooder swete,
> I loved alwey, as after my konnynge;
> And whan that I my lyf sholde forlete,
> To me she cam, and bad me for to synge
> This anthem verrrayily in my deyynge,
> As ye han herd, and whan that I hadde songe,
> Me thoughte she leyde a greyn upon my tonge.
> ll. 656–662

The child's life is not, however, truly prolonged, he is turned into a sort of cyborg designed to reproduce incessantly and monotonously the anthem, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, a paradoxical state which the boy himself accurately describes as "singing in my death" (l. 660). The paradox consists here also in the fact that the boy's only bodily function that is left, apart from his brief statement just before the ultimate death, is singing aloud, i.e. something that he is the least likely to be able to do because of the nature of his wound. It is also made clear that the

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Cf. W. Smith and J. Lockwood, *Chambers-Murray Latin-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh, London: Chambers, John Murray, 1976), p. 37.

boy even before his death had only a very vague notion of what the anthem was about, as his "elder fellow" who explained the song to him knew "but smal grammeere" (l. 536), i.e. was not good at Latin. The young martyr acquires thus a rather disquieting nature of a human gramophone transmitting sounds and notions whose place of origin is completely outside him.

The mechanical nature of the boy's "life in death" is stressed by the motif of the grain on the young martyr's tongue:

> "Wherfore I synge, and synge moot certeyn,
> In honour of that blisful Mayden free
> Til fro my tonge of takes is the greyn;
> And after that thus seyde she to me:
> 'My litel child, now wol I fecche thee,
> Whan that the greyn is fro thy tonge ytake.
> Be nat agast; I woll the nat forsake.'"
>
> ll. 663–669

The "holy monk" that is looking after the boy immediately takes away the grain bringing about the child's instantaneous, though peaceful, demise, an effect that strongly resembles switching off an electrical appliance. The grain staves off the moment of death and guarantees the boy's anomalous existence. It may readily remind the reader of the Greek mythological obol, i.e. a small coin placed under the dead body's tongue, rather than on it as in "The Prioress's Tale", and enabling the dead to pay the fare to Charon, the mythical ferryman who conveyed souls across the Styx to their ultimate destination in the Underworld.[7] The obol and Chaucer's grain symbolise both the transition between life and death, and the act of taking them away means a decisive abandonment of the realm of the living. The Greek custom of placing an obol in the dead person's mouth was probably related to the widespread fear of the revenant ghosts, the spirits of the dead who cannot find peace because they have not been properly buried. The grain in "the Prioress's Tale" is also clearly related to the problem of burial as it enables the young martyr to signal the place where his dead, or half-dead, body can be found, and thus make a Christian funeral possible. The Virgin appears here as a figure resembling Charon, the ferryman of the shades, which is in keeping with the title she is given in the anthem, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, where she is called, *Porta manes*, a phrase left untranslated in the Middle English version of the anthem, where the expression "Heaven's gate"[8] seems to refer

[7] Cf. M. C. Howatson, I. Chilvers (eds.), *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 117.

[8] L. D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside. . .*, p. 915. The beginning of this anthem, still quite popular in the Catholic Church, is:

> Alma Redemptoris Mater, quae pervia caeli
> Porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti,
> Surgere qui curat, populo.

The provided Middle English translation goes as follows:

> Godus Moder, Mylde and Clene
> Hevene yate and Sterre of se
> Saue thi peple from synne and we (woe).

to the Latin *quae pervia caeli*, and which would have to be translated as "the gate to the Underworld", "the gate to the realm of the dead", or at least "the gate of the souls of the departed", as such are the usual meanings of the Latin word, *manes*.[9] The Virgin could be then thought of as a guide of all souls, no matter if they are heading for the Underworld or the "Overworld", heaven or hell. The wholeness and integrity of virginity as such, which we have already discussed, makes it natural to look in the Virgin also for dark and threatening aspects, as well as the more usual "mild" and "sweet" ones.

And yet there is something more deeply moving, more essentially sentimental, in the discussed scene. A sense of *déjà vu* may easily overtake us when contemplating the misfortunes of the young worshipper of the Virgin in Chaucer's tale. We realise that his story bears a striking resemblance to some traditional love stories, such as the story of Romeo and Juliet, where the heroine drinks a potion that is going to make her apparently lifeless for 42 hours until she is woken up by her lover, or the story of the Sleeping Beauty, wounded by a spindle, and consigned to a death-like sleep, or the story of Snow White, whom the wicked stepmother tries to kill with a poisoned apple, but instead of dying she falls asleep until a prince charming come and brings her back to life with a kiss, or, like in the classical version by the Brothers Grimm, the prince's servants, who carry the coffin with Snow White within, stumble over a bush, which makes a bit of the poisoned apple "fly out of her throat".[10] All of the above are stories including the motif of the heroine's magic sleep, a paradoxical sleep that is very close to death, from which she wakes up to fall into her lover's arms, even though, as in "Romeo and Juliet", this project is not fulfilled, the lover's arms are cold with the cold of death, and the heroine passes, analogically to Chaucer's young martyr, from half-death to a fully-fledged, "mature" death.

We have to do with very ancient, archetypal stories that explore the middle ground between the erotic and the morbid, between love and death. The fact that it is usually a girl, rather than a boy, that is the protagonist of such tales seems to indicate, according to the supporters of a psychoanalytic approach to folktales, such as Bruno Bettelheim, that they are tales about the loss of virginity, represented by Sleeping Beauty's wound or by Snow White's eating of a red half of the poisoned apple, even though these events precede rather than follow the slumber, which, in its turn, is seen as betokening the heroine's virginity, i.e. a state of spiritual and physical barrenness and low activity, from which she has to be awoken by a representative of the opposite sex. A way out of this contradiction is to assume that the traumatic events that cause the girl's sleep symbolise the beginning of her menstruation, but structurally this theory does not make sense as menstruation is no way connected with being or not being a virgin.[11] Whatever

[9] Cf. W. Smith and J. Lockwood, *Chambers-Murray*. . ., p. 421.

[10] Cf. J. L. C. and W. C. Grimm, *Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Ware: Wordsworth / Children's Classics, 1993), pp. 220–221.

[11] Such interpretations can be found in the book by B. Bettelheim, "The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales". Cf. B. Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, tr. D. Danek (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985), Vol. 2, pp. 91–95, and 123–131.

the contradictions of the psychoanalytic approach, it remains true that folktales lend themselves quite easily to allegorical interpretations focused on the matters of sex and eroticism.

Connecting "The Prioress's Tale" with such tales presents several difficulties of which apparently the most obvious one is the male sex of the protagonist of Chaucer's tale. This difficulty is not so great as it seems as the tales like "Sleeping Beauty" belong to a great family of narratives known, in S.Thompson's taxonomy of folktales, as "Tales about Supernatural Husbands and Wives", which means that their supernatural protagonist may also be male, as, for example, in the famous story of "Cupid and Psyche", although, admittedly, this happens much less often, at least in classical and best known versions of the tales.[12] A regular feature of those tales is the occurrence of such motifs as magic sleep, magic forgetfulness, sudden estrangement of a loving couple, or the protagonist's loss of the power of speech.[13] All of them, in keeping with the logic of the rites of passage and all sorts of initiation rituals, are periods of crisis and of difficult, or impossible, communication that can be generally referred to as so many kinds of "enchantment",[14] which precede the moment of awakening, recognition, or reconciliation, i.e. of a broadly conceived "disenchantment", usually associated with a sexual fulfilment such as marriage, though in complex folktales there may be several enchantments and disenchantments. Enchantment is obviously, at least in some respects, a death-like state that creates in the reader or listener an expectation that it will eventually be overcome, and for the primitive imagination reflected in folktales such an overcoming was almost invariably connected with the celebration of a sexual union, i.e. of procreation and fertility. Virginity, if we accept it as a form of enchantment, in this context may only be a negative value, even though it may be sometimes nostalgically harked back to by some, not necessarily female, characters, who may, for example, want to return to their animal (enchanted) form, and to single life, when offended by their partners.[15]

An attentive reader must have long ago noticed that it is possible to make a particularly strong connection between "The Prioress's Tale" and the tales of the "Snow White" type, provided we accept the strongly paradoxical nature of this connection. In Chaucer's tale we have to do with a male Snow White whose enchantment, connected with accepting the grain, an equivalent of the magic apple, ends with a momentary awakening which is only a short prelude to the hero's ultimate and irrevocable death, which is something that does not normally happen in folktales. It is as if death and life changed places in Chaucer, the temporary and paradoxical death in "Snow White" tales appears here as superficial and

[12] Cf. S. Thompson, *The Folktale* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 87–105.

[13] The motif of the loss of the power of speech, eventually regained, seems to be limited to female protagonists only.

[14] The most classical form of enchantment is of course the assuming of an animal, or monstrous form, which also happens very frequently in the tales of supernatural husbands and wives.

[15] Cf. S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, p. 90.

anomalous life that covers the deeper reality of death, the supposed disenchantment, related to the removal of the grain from the boy's tongue, instead of being a triumph of life and sexuality, is a confirmation of the protagonist's death and of his virginity. The young martyr's life is apparently death-centred, although there is also the dimension of his afterlife which, no doubt, will be full of bliss and glory.

The grain, just as Snow White's apple, is used by an ingenious woman to produce a state of lethargy which precludes a proper burial, in "The Prioress's Tale" she is, however, a benevolent figure a reunion with whom, though achieved only after death, is an equivalent of the marriage motif in folktales. Interesting in this respect are the Jews, who look like a malignant version of "Snow White" dwarfs, forming also a homogenous, undifferentiated group totally engrossed in their mundane job of acquiring, by any means possible, more and more wealth:

> Amonges Cristene folk a Jewerye,
> Sustened by a lord of that contree
> For foule usure and lucre of vileynye,
> ll. 489–491

And yet they are trusted with a function reminiscent of the wicked stepmother, i.e. they are murderers motivated by a feeling of irrational enmity, though they, unlike the jealous queen, are quite successful in carrying out their murderous designs.

It seems that "The Prioress's Tale" may be said to function on two levels of abstraction, on the lower level it is a sort of "anti-folktale", a story that stands certain traditional expectations on their head, that uses initiatory paradigms in order to uphold the principle of death rather than life, that treats religious love as a sentiment closely related to death and hatred of other creeds. From this point of view the motto, *Amor vincit omnia* is heavily ironical, in "The Prioress's Tale" the protagonist's ardent religious sentiments lead to no positive effects, but only to an outbreak of implacable hostility, and love, as shown in the tale, reveals its utter ineffectuality, even God's love for His most devoted champions appears unable to save them, or at least to avenge their death. It is interesting, incidentally, that in this clearly anti-Semitic tale no mention is made of any of the Jews being punished for their misdeeds, nor are even any anti-Jewish measures contemplated, as if the Jews' malicious actions were a kind of natural disaster one can do nothing about, although the identity of the culprits is not even for a moment questioned.

On the other hand, "The Prioress's Tale" offers a vision of fulfilment in the hero's union with his "lady love", i.e. the Virgin. It is a fulfilment in virginity which seems impossible in physical terms, and for this reason is achievable only after death and through death. Death is then in "The Prioress's Tale" what life is in ordinary folktales, and the hero's bliss consists in being "awoken" to death after a paradoxical period, typical of almost all legendary heroes and heroines, of hovering in the intermediate zone between life and death.

It would be interesting to compare Chaucer's tale to another famous religious legend, that of "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", the "sleepers" awake after

spending several centuries in a cave, having fled from the persecution of Christians under a Roman emperor. They fall into a miraculous sleep from which they wake up after several centuries, without realising how much time has elapsed. When they imparted their story to the local bishop they quietly die out of old age.[16] Stories about a magic loss of the count of time, and of the heroes' reappearance after a unnaturally long period of absence are quite common within the broad category of the tales about supernatural wives. We meet there typically with a hero who is seduced by a supernatural woman and spends some enchanting moments with her, moments that in fact may turn out to be years, so that when he finally returns it may happen that his lifetime has already passed, and he is no longer a living man but a spectre, a revenant ghost from the past.[17] A similar story was used much later by John Keats in his *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, i.e. a story that presents death as a necessary consequence of seduction, and conceives of the lover's life after death as a dreamlike, unreal existence, suspended between this world and the other.

In "The Prioress's Tale" the Virgin is explicitly seen the one who assists those who are in death throes, cf. the Latin *sucurre cadenti*, which is rendered in the tale as "to been oure help and socour whan we deye" (l. 534).[18] In the tale she is indeed associated with the transition stage between life and death, also as the one who prolongs the hero's hovering between the two worlds. But the analogy with *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* can be pinned on "The Prioress's Tale" also without resorting to an overtly heretical interpretation. W. W. Skeat mentions, among analogues of "The Prioress's Tale", a ballad found in Percy's "Reliques":

> The Ballad alluded to is called "The Jew's Daughter" by Percy, and is to the effect that a boy named Hugh was enticed to play and then stabbed by a Jew's daughter, who threw him into a draw-well. His mother, Lady Helen, finds him by hearing his voice.[19]

The ballad provides a missing link between the Prioress's story and the motifs of seduction and *femme fatale*, but, as the present study has shown, the story, even as it stands, abounds in erotic overtones which play there a hardly less prominent role than in the presentation of the Prioress in the "General Prologue", even though in the tale they are curiously entwined with the theme of death. This should not be very surprising as the connection between death, or old age, and eroticism was one of Chaucer's favourite topics, visible also in "The Merchant's Tale", "The Miller's Tale", or in "The Book of the Duchess", where it is perhaps the most poignantly expressed.

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[16] Cf. M. Plezia (ed.), *Jakub de Voragine, Złota legenda* (The Golden Legend), tr. J. Plezia (Warszawa: PAX, 1955), pp. 259–263.

[17] A Welsh story of this sort, called "King Herla", is adduced as an analogue to "Sir Orfeo" in the standard edition of the tale, A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 35. The plots of the Middle English romance, "Sir Launfal", and of "Lanval", a tale by Marie de France also include the motifs of the hero's seduction and stay in the Otherworld.

[18] This connection is made by W. W. Skeat in his edition of "The Prioress's Tale", cf. W. W. Skeat (ed.), *Chaucer – The Prioresses Tale, Sire Thopas, The Monkes Tale, The Clerkes Tale, The Squieres Tale – from The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 148.

[19] Ed. W. W. Skeat, *Chaucer* . . ., p. xxiii.

Andrzej Wicher

Badanie granic erotyzmu w *Opowieści Przeoryszy* Geoffreya Chaucera

Streszczenie

Artykuł ten podejmuje kilka problemów związanych z interpretacją *Opowieści Przeoryszy*, która należy do gatunku znanego jako „żywoty świętych". Sama Przeorysza jest przedstawiona w „Prologu głównym" do *Opowieści kanterberyjskich* jako wysoce zalotna kobieta, która jedynie częściowo skrywa swoje wdzięki pod zakonnym habitem. Z analizy *Opowieści Przeoryszy* wynika przede wszystkim, że utwór ten, podobnie jak i opis Przeoryszy z „Prologu głównego", zawiera wiele ukrytych motywów i aluzji o charakterze erotycznym, które oczywiście nie podważają jego, zasadniczo dewocyjnego, charakteru. Erotyzm *Opowieści Przeoryszy* jest ściśle związany z, centralną dla tego utworu, tematyką dziewictwa i śmierci, ulegając dzięki temu daleko idącej sublimacji. Uderzające są równocześnie analogie, częściowo prześledzone w niniejszym artykule, między czternastowiecznym utworem Chaucera a starożytnymi mitami i schematami baśniowymi, przenależnymi do tak dobrze znanych opowieści jak *Śpiąca królewna* czy *Królewna Śnieżka*. Baśnie te, jak już wielu krytyków zauważyło, zawierają również, mniej lub bardziej zakamuflowane, elementy erotyczne, w których motyw utraty dziewictwa jest ściśle związany, podobnie jak w *Opowieści Przeoryszy*, z motywem śmierci lub pozornej śmierci. Autor wspiera swoje wnioski pracami B. Bettelheima, S. Thompsona i W. W. Skeata, jak również stara się umieścić interesujące go aspekty *Opowieści Przeoryszy* w szerszym kontekście *Opowieści kanterberyjskich*.

Andrzej Wicher

Les frontières de l'érotisme dans le *Conte de l'Abbesse* de Geoffrey Chaucer

Résumé

L'article traite de problèmes liés avec l'interprétation du *Conte de l'Abbesse* qui appartient au genre hagiographique. L'abbesse elle-même est présentée dans le „Prologue général" aux *Contes de Canterbury* comme une femme très frivole qui ne cache que partiellement ses charmes sous l'habit de religieuse.

L'analyse du *Conte de l'Abbesse* prouve que ce texte, ainsi que la description de l'Abbesse au „Prologue général", contient beaucoup de motifs et d'allusions latentes de caractère érotique ce qui ne contredit pas le sens général de cet ouvrage essentiellement pieux. L'érotisme du *Conte de l'Abbesse* est étroitement lié avec le thème central de l'oeuvre: celui de la virginité et de la mort; grâce à cela il subit une profonde sublimation. Ce qui frappe surtout, ce sont les analogies, en partie étudiées dans le présent article, entre le texte de Chaucer produit au XIV^{e} siècle et les mythes antiques, ainsi que les schémas de contes de fées aussi connus que *La Belle au Bois Dormant* et *Blanche-Neige*.

Comme l'ont remarqué maints critiques, ces contes de fées contiennent aussi, plus ou moins camouflés, des éléments érotiques où le motif de la perte de virginité est étroitement lié à celui de la mort ou de la mort apparente. L'auteur de l'article s'appuie dans la partie finale sur les travaux de B. Bettelheim, de S. Thompson et de W. W. Sheat. Il essaie également de montrer les aspects du *Conte de l'Abbesse* qui l'intéressent sur la toile de fond des *Contes de Canterbury*.

Maciej Nowak

A Sentimental Orgy: An Erotic Mischief in *A Sentimental Journey*

> So that when I stretched out my hand,
> I caught hold of the fille de chambre's
> ____ *SJ*, p. 143*

If a work devoted to sentiment and chic lachrymality concludes with a rather uncourteous allusion to a maid's sex organ, the reader's expectations are put on, and the hunger for some cathartic release gets something of a coarsely-cut substitute – a blank space pregnant with erotic suggestiveness. The sexual organ never mentioned makes us think it is just an ambivalence which can be expanded onto a voluble forum of intellectual speculation. The intellect sees many possibilities of interpreting the lack. Yet the commonsensical faculty in us gets the message at once – the *fille de chambre's*_____ can not be an abstract concept – it surely *is* a___.

Are disappointment, indignation, smirk, spinsterish discontedness, or, say, a masculine, coarse and frivolous approval of an erotic exposure – the modes of a "critical" response the author of *A Sentimental Journey* wanted to provoke in the readers of his "sentimental" work?

Is the final "lack" a berayal of the work's ethos? The journey is an evenly paced trot of an idle observer, a refined conversationalist, a virtuoso of etiquette, the knight of *politesse* vetoing the conceptual inertia of reason, advocating the heartly and sentimental ways of Nature. The lachrymal concern seeks its expression in manners which if hold any peripheral philosophy its must be the one of a sociable contact, a cohabitation of people.

Manners, the form the expression of sentiments is servilely contained in, are involved in anything social and communicable, they seem to be of no use to

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* L. Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (Penguin, 1987) All references are noted in the text within parentheses.

a solipsistic adventurer, nor do they continue to be any means in the moment of reflexive solitude. The actuality of manners, their social "productivity" rely solely on an interaction; the sensitivity to the issue how important the so-called manners may be to an epistemological reflection we mark in the thought of Shaftsbury and Burke as retold by Eagleton:

> Shaftsbury's unity of ethics and aesthetics, virtue and beauty, is most evident in the concept of manners. Manners for the eighteen century signify that meticulous discipling of the body which converts morality to style, deconstructing the opposition between proper and pleasurable.[1]

Eagleton's approach endeavours to unveil a bourgeois machination to mitigate the rigid policy that reason enforces upon the world – reason essentially projecting ends reverse to the interest of expansively enterprising social class. The rise of the importance of manners is ascribed to people's political ambition reshaping the custom pattern so it serves their ideological assumptions. In other words, a man-of-manners attempts at forging of an epistemo-ethical justification of the bourgeois common sense. Manners in their "manipulative effectiveness" are given priority over laws:

> Manners are what vex and sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine us[2]

The adventurous journey, a show of well-bred illocutionary becomes an example of posh orderliness; the sentimental parley is somewhat artificial, yet a times strangely auto-cynical:

> What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within this little span by him who interests his heart in everything, and who having eyes to see, what time and chance are perpetually holding out to him as he journeyeth on his way, misses nothing he can *fairly* lay his hands on.
>
> *SJ*, p. 51

The fragment reveals sentimentalist's interest in a novel contact, his inquisitiveness as far as the local detail is concerned, and the childish zeal to touch everything new he comes across. "Laying hands on" however, is an expression devoid of dyplomacy or infantile innocence. A touch, its "signly" ambiguity is central in the sentimentalist's reconnaissance. A touch, a physical reassurance, though customarily not prohibited, contradicts refined reservedness of an Englishman; one never knows when a touch may be read as a "sexually obliging" gesture. It is imbued with an ambivalence linking the a-sexual decorum with erotic readiness. The subject of our interest is the misty verge where the civlised and well-bred "orgiastically" and "transgresively" give in to the attitudinal qualities they have always negated and repelled from the cultured behaviour and speech. This will be carried out with regard to the study of the erotic, the "erotic" figuring here in its wider sense as

[1] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London, 1991), p. 42.
[2] Ibid., p. 42.

discussed by Georges Bataille in his *History of Eroticism*. The present, "erotic" reading views Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* as a work in which the scission between the ethico-ideological content and the "mischievious" latency is in fact conspicuously detectable if the text is suspended by an "erotic", critical closure. The study will focus on the literary images which illuminated by our interpretation will take on the status of erotically-valid objects at times referred to as "erotic requisites". The existential implications of such a requisite and its function will be brought out as contrasted with an object whose worldly operativity is solely justfied in its pragmatic significance. Hence *pragmata* will be sought to interfere negatively with the erotic spontaneity.

The Bataillean term "eroticism" and whatever it signifies, stand in the opposition to consumption, utility, commonsensical experience of the everyday routinuous circumspection, and finally – labour.[3] Eroticism akin but not identical with sexuality, stands for man's inherent drive for an unbothered satisfaction of one's restrained desire, a kind of existential autonomy the experience of which resolves the usual, mundane experience. The structure of the everyday way-abouts of man has been raised by the civilisational communion of all people attaining an intellectual and technological refinement, the world of which runs on storing and consumming of commodities. The subject absorbed in the monotony of the mundane with its unabating tide of commercial enterprise surging the masses in accordance to the principle of earning and spending, is destined to a discrete desire to resolve itself in a primeval unicity. Such an experience, a sensing of immediate wholeness is aimed against the concrete reality. Eroticism as want for transgression distrusts an utilisable object for its commercial qualities fettering man to the orderedness of culture and civilisation; the erotic and its object must be associated with a transgression, breach and *use*lessness.[4] Eroticism, a relieving fit of wholeness, is also a hushed fascination for the repugnant secretions of the body, the cultured discourse banned from its formal contemplativity. Labour and boredom equip our world with sophisticated facilisations of a thoughtful, yet the blind *techne* which facilitated man's autonomy from nature and animalness he was apt to repel with all the magniloquence of culture. Eroticism itself is not expelled from the mundane habitation of existence, it beyond doubt relieves the corporeal hardships every *now and then*, it is legitimised under the rational regime, yet by principle it opposes and negates the *pragmata* of the objects. The erotic is made to speak in its sublimised form – it is embodied in the aesthetic of the nude, and is thereby not viewed as something directly suggesting the physiological content of sexual organs, but also as sexual radiance transformed onto the objectival world.[5] Eventually some objects have taken on some sexual significance, the quality desire invests in them is the actual functionlessness. If an object has to play its part in the subtext of the erotic, it serves as

[3] G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, tr. I. Kania (Kraków, 1992), p. 10.
[4] Ibid., p. 9.
[5] Ibid., p. 130.

a mute means of communication, an agent of a discretely meaningful gesture. Let us animate the point with a sentimental case:

> The beautiful Grisset looked sometimes at the gloves, then sideways to the window, then at the gloves – and then at me. I was not disposed to break silence – I followed her example: so I looked at the gloves, and then at her – and so on alternately.
>
> *SJ*, p. 77

The ceremoniality of a sentimental interaction objects to the drudgeful hassle of a laborious action. It *takes its time*, stifles the impatient on-goings and walks of life of the pragmatic to goad concrete productivity.

Pragmata, Heidegger writes, is that which one has to do with one's concernful dealings, which term's ontological sensitivity has to be yet envigourated in a further phenomenal procedure.[6] Wielding a tool, *Dasein* operates exclusively on the ontical level where, as it were, its concern resists venturing into the wonder of being in its ontological purity. To paraphrase this in other terms, the consciousness attatched to its tool does not discern its purposeful presence itself. So is worldliness, indiscernible in the everyday routine, it is a constant inter-relation of the entities dwelling in it, veiling the absolute mysterium of Being in the occurrences of a common walk of life rather than in the moment of sublimated reflection. The "storage" of certitude for the subject is an investment on the ontical and "comfortable" surface of things, it is the routinised sense of satisfaction that the objects of my environment work obedientely within the frame of my projection. If the worldliness is to manifest itself to the ontical tranquility, it does so by means of a mode of concern which involves a rupture of the normal, everyday one, via a strike of deficiency. This comes with equipment's unusability, when it enters the mode of obtrusiveness.[7] That is to say, it loses its transparency synchronised to the occurrences which constitute the routine preoccupation. The tool is out of order, it resists the mundane concern with a veto of obstinacy, conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and the ready-to-handedness suffers the loss of ground, comes to a turbulent discontinuity.

The context of equipment is lit up not as something never seen before, but as totality constantly sighted before in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself.[8]

The message of a lack, thereupon, announces the presence of the world not as hazy background of a concernful procedure, but as multireferentiality of the totality seemingly soliciting the ready-to-hand. The unveiling of ready-at-handedness is then in the focus, and in the open stands the contextuality of all action. The erotic "authenticity" is after revealing the worldliness in its wholeness, it beckons the purposeless environmentality of an object which in case of Yorick's sentimental encounter are the gloves. These though central in the scene in terms of physical presence they appear as a mere *pre*text of an erotic game. This game

[6] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarric and E. Robinson (Oxford, 1980), p. 97.
[7] Ibid., p. 102.
[8] Ibid.

converts each gesture into a celebration, a solemn theatre of refined gestures that are there just for the sake of being enticingly refined. The idle expression of the erotic turns an object into a fetishised ornament which is to distract the mundane transparence of things and let them express the irrational right of sexual thrill.

In an innocent frolic, a jovial sociable intercourse, one senses the nearness of erotic involvement, a mystical disclosure of a sexual opportunity. Decorum is the spokes-system of morality and culture, it in some way adheres to the patriarch voice of restriction and prohibition. According to Bataille, it *is* prohibition in various cultures often repealed against sexuality, that enhances the sexual, or erotic value of its object of desire.[9] The posibility of avid indulgence, a self-satisfied breaching of a taboo is sought to distinguish man from his natural origin – animals, as it is claimed, are unable to whet and diversify desire and its objects by organising their collective bodies under the power of prohibition systems.

An erotically-valid object, as we remarked is not exclusively the person one shares the sovereignty of unrestrainedness which is achieved in a sexual intercourse – but also the object, place, or smell associated with *her* or *him.* Transgression needs a communicative code, it sets itself under the mask of signs – it understands more than it is able to utter, and if uttered it never takes the literal meaning. The status of the gloves in the scene is that of a transgressive requisite, the sentimental tension quenches completely their *usual*, ontical function. Their range of functionability is extended into the mode of expression of the erotic *pre*text; their eroto-worldly context rips them of their equipmental shine. This makes them by no means resemble Van Gogh's peasant shoes as interpreted by Heidegger.[10] The *pre*-textual unconcealedness of the gloves is not that of equipmentality of the shoes to which Heidegger's liricism pays its almost panegirycal due to, but that of observant idleness consuming its time lavishly in ceremonial sex games. The mode of transgression therefore is not content with a wholeness of man and his labour, his consciousness is not to be dissolved in the common "reliabilities" of a tool, it instead recoils into the non-being of sovereign un concern, it becomes a boundless prostitution of sense.

An "erotic" reading of a text perceives any behaviour as subject to radical variability, it confirms the dynamic character of human teleology and existential attitudes. It divulges the discrepancies between the actual and *the alleged*, and the ever imminent readiness to refute what has been guarded as most representative of our civilised world – the systems of prohibition. The forgetfulness-in-transgression in Bataille is not a hedonistic isolation, it rather is a generous and gratitudinuous distribution of one's energetic potential to a worldly wholeness. The sexual activity is grounded in the principle of a gift.[11] Physically, a sexual act is a gift of superfluous energy, in a more composite and externalised form the very same

[9] G. Bataile, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 130.

[10] M. Heidegger, *Language, Poetry, Thought*, tr. A. Hofstadter (Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), p. 36–37.

[11] G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 31.

principle governs the mode of distributing women amongst men. The sentimental traveller gives himself to the world, his experience is physical and "concrete"; he offers his sentiments to all woman and is not, for this reason palled with the unerotic monotony of the domestic boredom, nor destined to immaterial fantasies.

> . . . when I have observed how many a foul step the inquisitive Traveller has measured to see sights and look into discoveries; all which, as Sancho Panca said to Don Quixote, they might have seen dry-shod at home.
>
> *SJ*, p. 36

The sentimental traveller is by no means haunted by a Don-Quixotic obssessive devotion to the chosen ideal or idol. The modus of knavery seems incredibly uneconomical; for sentiments are after giving themselves *away* completely to the stimuli at-hand. A romance-like loyalty in case of a traveller breeds devotion to semblences nourished by the memory of the idolised, blunting attentivness to the sentimental environmentality he finds himself the new-coming man of. The sentimentalist is open to the specific vibration of the temporary disclosure of events, he treats the figures form the gallery of his ventures to his sympathetic concern being indiscriminate of their social origin. The subjects to emotional care are often rural people themselves capable of positive feelings and sentiments. Yorick meets the man mourning the ass, shows concern for Maria's story, his being-there is purified of visionary fancies; sentiments advocate the priority of heart over head, but common sense and well-manneredness mould the interactive form of an "emotive" adventure. The sentimental traveller knowing his risks, taking the otherness of a different place and custom for granted travels nevertheless urged by the promise of a novel contact in a novel setting.

> It will always follow from hence, that the balance of the sentimental commerce is always against the exppatriated adventurer: he must buy what he has little occasion for at their own price – his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large discount. . .
>
> *SJ*, p. 33

The openness to chance, losing one's attatchment to the whispers of whim, a whim of a civilised consummerist, would adumberate subtely the sentimentalist's need of disinterested prodigality, a relieving escapism and uprooting of one's domestic habits that have become a tedious commonplace. One of the essential trait of humanity consists in setting restraints upon one's needs then to revel in enjoyment with no limits; jeopardy and dread are claimed positive here as they enable a transgression and encourage its sensational intensity. Tresspassing is uplifted by its own possibility and the reassurance when possibility becomes actuality – prohibition is no longer anything absolute.

What is specific to erotic reading with its spotlight of interest penetrating the difference between humanity as culture, and humanity as animalness is the dynamism and flexibility of the behavioural demarcation bond cleaving the two. The term eroticism owes some area of synonimity to "existential authenticity" if the case is a comparison of the two. The erotic does not come in the open as vulgar

entity of the civilised, i.e. as devoid of exaltation everyday-life as much as it does not identify one-sidedly with the concealed provocability or perversiveness of the sexual organs in their purely physiological aspect. It absorbs both. It ought to if it is to provide a successful essencing of human, attitudinal dynamism. Human overall pattern of poses evinces astounding flexibility of its cultured facet, the produce of negating the natural, to overturn to its contrary quality namely that of beastly unrestrainedness. The proximity of the two mutually exluding themselves modes of behaviour are attempted at being summed under the non-intellectual and non-rational "phenomenology" of the erotic. This dialectic embraces both the moment of ceremonial sublimation, man's distancing of himself from animalness and the rampant come-back to primitive indulgence, his participation in orgiastic festivity with no restraints. It might be infered hereby that the dynamism of erotology hinges on the sensitivity to the "wholeness" subsumming the overtly communicable, mythical aspect of the expressable and experential as well as the transgressive one which betrays unscrupulously its cultured alternative. Erotology, as we might call it, scans the leakings of sexual unorthodoxy in the customary rationale; at some point man starts to act in a way provokingly adverse to his usual habits of expression. He reveals his secret and shameful nature, affirms it with a somewhat perverse indignation in a manner which normally would not be approved of.[12] Moreover, the very thought of such a transgression would be stifled by a strain of inhibition and intimidation.

Bataille's discourse is original and in many ways precedential in the way sexuality and physiology are treated and publicised. *The History of Eroticism* is the study of man's cultured constitution transcending into the beyond of obscenity, repulsive secretion of his physiology that share their biological basis with body and its organs in their spiritualised and aestheticised perception. The "history's" subject of interest includes the issue of transition from simple sexuality of animals to mental activity of men in which process the role of sexuality is central.[13] At stake are judgements, thoughts, statements of sexual qualification of objects which in-themselves may have nothing sexual about them, as well as nothing contradicting sexuality as such. The pathos patronising this approach is not, "methodologically" speaking, justified in a strikingly illuminative way. It disrespects an exact approach propping its justification with a sober rhetoric which states that the obscene is considerably constitutive to our nature. Interestingly, obscenity, things decaying in us are not even included in the formal outlay of prohibitions.[14] We fear the animal in us, we see it there and yet we do not respond to it affirmatively. We change the form of our animalish vagaries having had to take recourse in ones in one way or the other; it is argued that the domain of sacrum and its ritual character, are indeed a sacralised form of demonstrating animal unrestrainedness, a celebruous compensation for the rigid principles curbing our choice in

[12] Ibid., p. 105.
[13] Ibid., p. 21.
[14] Ibid., p. 41.

secular being. In which case, man's careful edifice of the civilised myth erected by negating the the "putrid truth" of nature, is forever an unsettled and precarious matter. Serious and imperturbable contemplation is one of the many modes of being; fall, transgression are the neccesary backlashes of the authentic, they take the biscuit mocking the absolutist ambition of the rational. In *A Sentimental Journey* the transgressive "leaks" are conspicuously inferable. We trail their traces in the sentimental encounters in which detectable is the disharmony between the articulated operating within the regime of civil decorum and the very action, or the actual sentimental intercourse – the magnetism of hearts, a touch or physically sensed unison of people. This differentiates the ether of well-mannered words and the very space of erotico-sentimental vibration, which will be discussed further with regard to Yorick's interest in measuring Grisset's pulse. The other level of the transgressive *play* concerns the work as narrative composition, its experimental finale whose ambiguity, as we have already noticed, is suggestively erotic.

Let us refer to the scene in the Parisian shop again to heed the message of sentimental gestures which are the signs of an erotic *pre*text:

> Anyone may do a casual act of good nature, but a continuation of them shows it is the part of temperature; and certainly, added I, and if it is the same which comes from the heart, which descends to the extremes (touching her wrist) I am sure you must have one of the best pulses of any woman in the world – Feel it, said she, holding out her arm. So laying down my hat, I took of her fingers in one hand, and applied the two forefingers of my other to the artery. . . .me sitting in my black coat, and in my lack-a-daysical manner, counting the throbs of it, one by one, with as much true emotion as if I had been watching the critical ebb or flow of her fever. . .
>
> *SJ*, p. 75

The throb of artery gives the stylishly self-contemplating sentimentalist the insight into the somatic *root* of the sentiment. Excitement, a pleasurable exasperation on discovering the presence of flesh in the innocent fascination with a feminine beauty is subtle demistification of amorous idealisation that negates somaticity, should it imply the involvement of things usually not mentioned in well-mannered conversation. The pulse, another instance of an erotic "requisite", and another *pre*text for maintaining the physical contact, is more daring a transgressive revelation since it resorts to a purely physiological imagery, the sexual object is not only an attractive female, it is also a body with its organic, metabolic turmoil. Obviously, this recognition is far from being framed as discovering the necessary perverse-in-man, it puts the erotico-transgressive terms in the rhetoric of sentimental stylishness which is the paragon of civilised achieve. Hence the sexual is made to speak innocently in a tactfully expressed metaphor of the pulse, the stylishness of the style neutralises the loathsomeness of the somatic content presented in this situation; the style, as it seems, masks the unaesthetic truth, aesthetises it *perforce*. The issue of the aesthetic overlapping the ethical appears relevant again – the style is a means of manipulation, an agent of cultured censorship, difficult to deconstruct since its actual productivity is not that of finite concepts.

Secondly, style as an esthetical cathegory is not an aftermath of ephemeral contingency – it has to be worked out over a longer period of time. A stylist has to take painstaking efforts to learn his craft. A writer, or a painter do not invest their immediate self into their work. Painter puts his style into his creation which:

> he has to master . . . as much in his own attempts as in the painting of others. . . It is in others that expression takes on its relief and really becomes signification.[15]

The walk of style is a way of being of which alteration or re-formation is inaccesible for individual decision. Style does not come into being in the craze of individual, internal scission or revelation, it is not a frame the utterer, or creator can bound himself within; it looms in the scope of everyday gestures scattered in the eons of dull routine. Eventually, it crystalises itself in the end when the creator has been muffled with the tranquility of an ordinary task. Ponty writes:

> Even when the painter has already painted, and even if he has become in some respects master of himself, what is give to him with his style is not a manner, a certain manner of procedures or tics that he can inventory, but a mode of formulation that is just as recognisable for others and just as little visible to him as his silhouette or his everyday gestures.[16]

Style is the part of rational policy to avoid transgressive vicissitudes in the cultured concern, it aims at imposing uniformity upon the whole human existence by cutting out the uncensored from its discourse or convert it to an articulable form, its function has been to *euphemise* the ignoble truth about man's origin being a defecating and ill-smelling creature of nature whose, *uneuphemised* determination might not seem a primeval source worth identifying oneself with. Style distorts the reality but its modus of deformation becomes in the end a conventionalised voice cherishing its right, the right of the style, an institutionalised being.

The style of a sentimentalist is the style of behaviour strictly linked with that of verbal expression which factors ultimately mould the didactic, pro-Christian ideological content of the work. The order of the erotic underlying this content is the order of a mischief dormant in the ambivalence of allusion whose intensity amounts to a customary scandal in the final break-up of the novel's narration.

Stylisation sought akinly to the interpretation we have suggested, is mistrusted by the Nietzschean over-man who notices in it a crafty tool of the weak and servile who postulate the regime of a de-individualised commonplace, a grey middleway quenching superior enterprise. In one of his aphorisms the manipulative character of stylisation and esthetisation is firmly interrogated:

> "Giving style" to one's character – a great and rare art! It is exercised by all those who see all the strengths and weaknesses of their own natures and then comprehend them in an artistic plan until everything appears as art and reason and even weakness delights the

[15] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, tr. R. C. McClearly (Northwestern Univ. Press, Inc., 1964), p. 52.
[16] Ibid., p. 53.

> eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added: there a piece of original nature has been removed: both by long practice and daily labour. Here the ugly which could not be removed is hidden: there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime...[17]

To reinterpret and make sublime has been the substance of the illocutionary ether where utterance is to curb the behaviour of man who meets another man, it provides a model of interaction and imposes a limited area of the content the conversation may articulate itself within. Style negates authenticity which is experiencable on the grounds of soveregn ego beyond the rabble body of democritising cultures. Nietzsche destroys the myth of the Christiano-democratic rhetoric, like a false ideology it masks the true meaning – in its crafty stylishness it is opposed to the spontaneity of what we call eroticism.

Eroticism and Thought

Eroticism languishes in the conceptual productivity of thought. Everything that stands on the side of intellect disdains the significance of the sexual particularly in its obscenest aspect. Should it be given a reflexion – it is indeed a reflexion of a patronising, eloquent voice of the sublime rationale.[18] Psychoanalysis is said not to give eroticism its due, the existential expression of desirefulness and lascivious cravings, is sterilised under the despotism of academic essencing. The human "demistified" teleology as we already know, in fact thrives on the erotic despite its "statutory" disgust with the unaesthetic side of somaticism unseparable from it. No sooner had humanity enjoyed the leap to civilisation, the triumph of having negated the "scruffiness" of the wild than it sensed the want to re-enter the state of primeval unbotheredness and sovereignty. Hence the moment of disgust has not been vanquished once and for all: the civilised mediatedness and monotony will forever have its adjacent profundis of possible sexual tresspasses, decadent pleasures or sadomasochistic intercourses. The mutidunous exchange between the powerful civilised and the-talked-of, and the powerful perverse and the-nevermentioned in terms other than that of cursing or medical discourse, is strictly connected with the opposition of the determined and the undetermined. It is also represented as the scission between intelligence and passion.[19] What fascinates us and appeals to the passionate directly, is mute to the attention of intelligence. Since the latter cannot justify the presence of passions – it humilates and negates their source. Bataille claims that intelligence *is* capable of expatiating on the transcendent succesfully, yet it takes up the habit of over-abstracting things failing to comprehend them in their concrete wholeness of the real. Its world of abstract things is copied from that of the corporeal ones – the whole project being dominated by the principle of utility. The fact is that the potential fertility of intellect is on the

[17] F. Nietzsche, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and tr. W. Kaufmann (Penguin Books), pp. 98–99.
[18] G. Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, p. 16.
[19] Ibid., p. 94.

positive side in Bataille, but what is being pushed for in this matter is a radical reform of its representational economy.

Bataille's eroticism-sensitive discourse, as it were, does-not-mind whether it has achieved a sophisticated level of exact eloquence. Its contemplating of "wholeness" is by no means set on systematic grounds. The distrust of determinacy as the always possible failure to the satisfactory expression of oneself is vividly exemplified in Artaud's text here seen through the prism of Derrida's reading. We mention Artaud's non-conformist proclamations because of their apparent pertinence in the question of alertness toward the voice of the erotic in its physiological nakedness. Artaud notices his being absolutely dispossessed of his utterance when articulated, written, represented in the work. The *difference* he notices is the cause of his indignation – indignation toward his lack of autonomy as the author. His despair is manifested in a vulgar poetics of defecation and the repelling aspect of physiology which he uses when he refers to his writerly produce. Derrida's critical stylisation immitates the angry poetics of Artaud's protest:

> Like excrement, like turd, which is also well known, a metaphor of penis, the work should stand upright. But the work, as excrement, is but matter without life, without force or form.[20]

It is the despair of one's never being able to be present in the signly determined, in other words, in comprehensible discourse whose comprehensibility completely relies on the conceptual trimming of the "authentic message". The movement of meaning is the movement of a treacherous and ironical play. What Artaud wants to express is pure body, some sanguine somaticism free from the decay and filth of the prudish word adherent to the oxidental culture. Defecation, secretion of hideous slime, repugnant feces, contamination in his diction represent in fact spirituality and idealism. The poet's message is repossessed by the censorship of the spiritual which procedure is called "a cardinal theft" administered by God himself. Not God the creator but:

> God-the-Demiurg . . . the trickster, the counterfeiter, the pseudonymous, the usurper, the opposite of the creative, artist, the artisanal being, the being of the artisan, Satan![21]

Poet's radicalisation, a resentful speculation is to make up for his articulatory unpower – is not writing for a writer something more than a mere game of literature-making? Writing becomes a problem of cardinal significance – it is not a mere textual *difference* one will not put up with, it is the godly furtiveness of every gesture, which is inescapable since one's birth – the bloody separation from the Orifice – the process analoguously reiterated in one's defecation.

> Defecation, the daily separation with the feces . . . is, as birth, the initial theft which simultaneously depreciates me and soils me. This is why the history of God, a genealogy of stolen value, is recounted as the history of defecation.[22]

The somewhat metaphorical generalisation shows us the instance of a "blasphemously" put proximity of *sacrum* and *profanum*. This rather transgressive escha-

[20] J. Derrida, "Parole Soufflé", in *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London, 1990), p. 183.
[21] Ibid., p. 182.
[22] Ibid.

tology of exhaustion reveals a brisk manifestation of the interdependence between the sublimated, the rationale proper and the repellent, ignoble, decaying. In Artaud the two are made to speak as one, the "one" intervening in life as the negatively decadent of the lofty and double-speaking logos. Spirit and excrement *are all the same* – there is some awarness of the erotic-in-the-world in this expressive attitude – it is by paralleing the despotism of dogmatic eloquence with the curse of the marginalised "code" of defecation that the demaskation of the erotic, in its wider sense, and the disclosure of its dynamism take place. The erotico-transgressive activity in writing consist perhaps in the perverse contention with one's autonomy to break the prohibition of blasphemy: the idea is to overburden the furtive determinacy with a counterbalance of abuse since the repossession of oneself-in-words is improbable. Whether Artaud blunted his "textual" intelligence by taking steps against the grand Thief, by nevertheless looking for a reliable speech of the body and cruelty is a different matter. The important thing is that a certain sensitivity was proclaimed, namely the unconceptuable sensitivity that the secret(!)ology of detritus is a possibility on the same ground that the issue of transcendence in its eschatological dimension is.

The philosophy of abuse, which in its transgressive ambition is in a way erotic, in its discrete form speaks between the lines of the "sentimental" journal since it orgiastically betrays the law of nature and heart. To recall it again, nature in the sentimental air is *a* Nature aesthetised, the cultured determinacy renders it with a capital letter. It is like the nature of the Stoics, rational and perfect, a model of harmony for the people to follow. Yet this seems to be a metaphorical exaggeration, an abuse of truth – Stoics are hauled over the coals in Nietzsche's rhetorical frenzy for transforming their poetical dream into an ontological vision, that is to say, for seeking the model of purposefulness for the people in nature itself that is in-itself indifferent and wild.[23] In the sentimental myth, nature is indeed capitalised and *euphemised* in the Stoic manner:

> I conceive every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself. . . – tis a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of NATURE, and those affections which rise out of her, which make us love each other – and the world better than we do.
>
> *SJ*, p. 109

Yorick looks at Nature as the source of cultured refinement, it is a supreme being itself the primeval root of the most perfect esthetics which as we have discussed has a major say in administering the claims of ethics. No doubt this view may seem oversentimentalised and artificial and such attributes could have been ascribed to the entire work if not had been for the curious occurrence of silenced pun concluding the narrative. The cognitive law of innocent and affectionate Nature, the humanist wish to spy the nakedness of the heart, approach the premises of the erotic *par excellence*. And what we mean by the erotic leak is not an interpretable allu-

[23] F. Nietzsche, *Poza dobrem i złem*, tr. S. Wykrzykowski (Warszawa, 1990), p. 13.

sion lurking in the work's florid content, but a transgressive gesture made by the author himself who sacrifices his writing's ethos to the erotic doublespeak and irony.

> So that when I stretched out my hand, I caught hold of the fille de chambre's____
> *SJ*, p. 143

The story lacks a moral. In a way leaving the reader to work out the conclusion on his own is the author's manouevre to retain an autonomy of the meaning *at run* – secondly, it is also a kind of offense and disrespect toward the sentimental idiom of the work. The *fille de chambre's*____ is also a hesitation to terminate the work with a finite, didactic growth. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche's bombastic arguments target the notion of a "moral". Human cognition excludes the possibility of a truly disinterested insight, the fact is that any research is a conclusion-oriented one where the outcome is actually a message precept-like and instruction-like one corrupted with didacticism. Interestedness underlies any philosophical thesis including one that aims at a perfect essencing of a fundamental scheme of things from any subjective contamination. Those who make up the model of causality and evaluation absolutise a mere rhetorical coherence between the purposefulness of will and the indifference of Nature as was the case of the Stoics. At stake is a figure of speech, an emotive illustration procuring a metaphysical illusion goaded by will to power.[24] His deconstruction victimises a false moral which intrudes upon the unrestrained potentiality of the sovereign will. Nietzsche's philosophy batters the problem with a discourse hyperbolised with insult and abuse.

It may be claimed therefore that *A Sentimental Journey* is ultimately an abuse of writerly manners, or better still, of the "ethics" of narration. The sentimental pathos is now betrayed, the unfinished text announces its de-*moral*-ised autonomy and at risk is the credibility of the sentimentalist's credo. The sentimental *journa*-list participates in the meaninglessness of the erotic gap. The erotic, to conclude, does not mean, it is felt, it is a generous gift of *everything* one has written to the world – a wholeness bereft of conclusion. The recognition of transgression is a yes-saying to a prodigal, vital force which having created destroys the fruit of its labour. The nature of this force, the infinite reassurance, is erotic. Perhaps the erotic suggestiveness may provoke a sense of distaste, obviously enough, the conclusion of the narrative does not serve any didactic or pragmatic purpose – the erotic has manifested itself as *the erratic*, it has no concrete object of its own. The manner in which the subject "lays his hands on" is not fair by the rule of *politesse*. All in all, having meandered between more or less overt disclosures of sexuality concealed under the voluble mantle of the sentimental myth, the work yields to an erotic vacum, the openness of fille de chambre's_____ the interpretation or **visualisation** of which is left to the fancy of the reader.

[24] F. Nietzsche, *Poza dobrem i złem*, tr. S. Wykrzykowski (Warszawa, 1990), p. 13.

Maciej Nowak

Sentymentalna orgia: erotyczna przewrotność w *Podróży sentymentalnej*

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest analizą *Podróży sentymentalnej* Sterne'a z punktu widzenia ukrytych w niej cienistych miejsc, w których cywilizowana postawa dobrze wychowanego dżentelmena ustępuje „orgiastycznym" nieomal obsesjom erotycznym. Rozumiejąc erotyzm, za Bataillem, jako opozycję kulturowo ukształtowanej użyteczności i zdrowego rozsądku, autor odczytuje powieść Sterne'a poprzez wyszukiwanie w niej „rekwizytów erotycznych", przedmiotów, których status funkcjonalny nie jest dyktowany użytecznością pragmatyczną, a których obecność w tekście świadczy o próbie uwolnienia erotycznej spontaniczności – tłumionej uwarunkowaniami kulturowych wymogów brytyjskiego dystansu wobec innych.

Maciej Nowak

L'orgie sentimentale: la fouberie érotique dans *Le Voyage sentimental*

Résumé

L'article est une analyse du *Voyage sentimental* de Sterne du point de vue d'endroits ombragés dans lesquels l'attitude civilisée d'un gentleman bien élevé cède aux obsessions érotiques presque „orgiastiques". En comprenant l'érotisme, d'après Bataille, comme opposée à l'utilité formée par la culture et le bon sens, l'auteur effectue la lecture du roman de Sterne visant à y déceler des "accessoires érotiques", objets dont le statut fonctionnel n'a rien à voir avec l'utilité pragmatique, mais dont la présence dans le texte témoigne de la tentative de libérer la spontanéité érotique étouffée par les exigences culturelles de la distance bien britannique envers les autres.

Małgorzata Nitka

The Letter of Seduction

In George Farquhar's epistolary collection, the writer thus exults over the arrival of a letter:

> I have had your Letter, Madam, and all that I understand by it, is that your Hand is as great a Riddle as your Face, and 'tis as difficult to find out your Sense in your Characters, as to know your Beauty in your Mask; but I have at last conquer'd the Maidenhead of your writing, as I hope one day I shall that of your Person; and I'm sure you han't lost your Virginity, if the lines in your Complexion be half so crooked as those in your Letter.[1]

The eventually induced reply to mail pursuit comes to signify the onset of seduction, arrives to anticipate the carnal act; the pen traversing the hitherto impervious blankness records the signs of consummation, breaks silence of resistance as it tears the maidenhead of writing, as it cleaves the hymen of script. As Jacques Derrida reminds us in his complicated reading of the term, hymen is a sign of betweenness, a word whose semantic membrane stretches between marital fusion and difference as it communicates the rhetoric of the border: "the hymen. . .produces the effect of a medium (a medium as an element enveloping both terms at once; a medium located between the two terms). It is an operation that both sows confusion between opposites and stands between the opposites 'at once'."[2] Being a tissue of protection, a tenuous barrier that separates the inside from the outside of a woman, or in other words desire from fulfilment the hymen inheres in diacritical histology.

"There exist treatises on membranes", which is what a hymen is, "or *hymenologies*; descriptions of membranes or *hymenographies*", remarks Derrida. And the word hymenography celebrates a fusion between hymen and writing, a marriage already proposed or rather announced in Farquhar's turn of phrase. As one enters a network of a lexical maze in order to pursue the history of hymen, one

[1] *The Works of George Farquhar*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford, 1988), pp. 335–356.

[2] All ensuing comments on hymen quote Jacques Derrida's anatomy of the subject performed in *Dissemination*, tr. B. Johnson (Chicago, 1981), pp. 208–226.

cannot do so without soon availing oneself of a textile web, an etymological thread whose knots are: "*uphaino* (to weave, spin – the spider web – machinate),. . .*huphos* (textile, spider web, net, the text of a work – Longinus), and. . .*humnos* (a weave, later the weave of a song, by extension a wedding song or song of mourning)". And dictionaries report that in times "when writing was unknown, most of the words used to designate a poetic composition were borrowed from the art of the weaver, the builder, etc". The hymen is then affiliated with a text insofar as both implicate a textile syntax; furthermore, while inquiring into the vicinity of the word one has to inevitably arrive at membrane which once seems to have been a surface of/for writing as it originally denoted parchment.

At issue there must be virginity which writing necessarily incorporates and which may be a condition that every act of inscription has to consider and tackle, if to write is to cover but also divide, undo, the white paper with black marks, pierce its blank integrity with signs. Delight one takes in writing seems to include physical pleasure as the writer's body "knows the joy of drawing on and rhythmically incising a virgin surface".[3] In Farquhar's phrase, the hymen is a scriptural metaphor whereas letter-writing in turn is decoyed into a syntax of seduction whose medium or even substance, its very principle, it becomes.

As Jean Baudrillard insists, "the eighteenth century still spoke of seduction" which was "a central preoccupation of the aristocratic spheres"[4], perhaps as central as epistolary discourse. If seduction is the cardinal concern of the period, its literary vehicle is the epistolary novel which made up about 20 percent of the total of eighteenth-century fiction.[5] Many epistolary novels are, in words of Ruth Perry, "tales of love and sex" in which an exchange of letters always gravitates towards a sexual climax.[6] If letters and love, of whose scenario seduction might be an episode, converge on the epistolary novel, this is because they belong to the same order of experience. What correspondence shares with love is the economic experience of exchange, a principle of reciprocity and, what follows, reversibility of positions according to whose rhythm both they unfold. Loving is like corresponding, that is to say it inheres in alternating, taking turns without lingering on too much: in an epistolary affair positions must rotate between reading and writing, as one cannot assume one and the same role for too long without killing discourse. The critical point of correspondence, the point around which writing turns is the point of arrival of the letter as the one at which a reversal of positions must occur in order to make writing go on. It is a junction, a place or moment of becoming, decisive, momentous indeed, for the whole system of exchange together with all its repercussions; "in no other type of verbal exchange does the mere fact of

[3] Roland Barthes, Preface to *The Civilisation of Writing*, quoted in Georges Jean, *Writing. The Story of Alphabets and Scripts*, tr. J. Oates (London, 1992), p. 196.

[4] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, tr. B. Singer (London, 1990), p. 1.

[5] Natascha Wurzbach, *The Novel in Letters* (London, 1969), p. ix.

[6] See Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York, 1980), pp. 158–159. Perry mentions in this context Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between A Nobleman and His Sister* and Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*.

receiving or not receiving a response carry such meaning",[7] states Janet Altman. The event of arrival of a reply must always be a meaningful moment in the same way in which the letter's failure to arrive is fraught with implications too, as the lover's discourse translates these facts into either compliance or resistance.

Letters which narrate a seduction progress chronicle first and foremost their own story: they are a record of writing, its acceptance or rejection which is acceptance or rejection of the writer and in this respect seduction always unfolds on paper: "Be my Letters the Test of your Passion, if they are acceptable I must be so."[8] Once sent away, the letter never disappears without a trace and thus one never fully loses sight of one's writing and reads from a distance of its life on the far side. For this reason letters act as envoys whose mission is to reconnoitre the relationship, get the lie of its land.

The epistolary novel demands that writing make advances towards seduction, whereby it makes it approach inevitability. Letters themselves seem to be invested with inevitability or destiny: persistence of script, or its call, puts one under an obligation to respond and thus enter, become part of the relay of writing. As Altman remarks,

> To write a letter is not only to define oneself in relationship to a particular you; it is also an attempt to draw that you into becoming the I of a new statement.[9]

For a woman to reply to a letter means to enter an exhausting network of writing and subscribe to paper intimacy that renders her forgetful or perhaps too weak to seek an exit; and as Baudrillard would have it, to render weak is to seduce.[10] If an answered letter functions as a catalyst for seduction, its course must be a fatal one, the woman's writing poised on a precipitous edge can take her to a downfall. Registering a receipt of a letter, Farquhar translates its arrival into an event of triumph while the letter itself is fetishised into a trophy, evidence of conquest in which a woman's affections or sexual favours are pledged.

The conquest, starts with writing, a pen being "the most effective way to woo a lady".[11] In Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, seduction casts a shadow of writing, too: an early description of Lovelace, which is to be a word of warning against him, emphasises his being either "notoriously. . . a man of pleasure"[12] or in "vacant nightly hours" (75) a man of writing with "a pen in his fingers" (74), a man whose seductive energy is accumulated in his pen to which "his thoughts flow

[7] Janet Altman, *Epistolarity. Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, 1981), p. 120.

[8] Mary Delariviere Manley, *Court Intrigues* (London, 1711), p. 138.

[9] J. Altman, *Epistolarity*. . ., p. 122.

[10] See Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 83. That seduction feeds on weakness the victim confuses with strength is recognized by Clarissa herself: ". . . it is plain to me now. . . that he had as great confidence in my weakness, as I had in my strength. And so in point entirely relative to my honour, he has triumphed. . . for he has not been mistaken in me, while I have in myself!" (381–382).

[11] Ruth Perry, *Women*. . ., p. 161.

[12] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 74. Page numbers in text refer to this edition.

rapidly" (74). It is precisely this addiction to the pen that renders him dangerous as writing turns an alternative to seduction, or maybe its very principle: seduction is writing. And yet, the pen placed in Lovelace's fingers seems to scratch a certain flaw on the portrait of the seducer who avails himself of what Richardson deemed an essentially feminine device when he remarked: "The pen is almost as pretty an implement in a woman's fingers, as a needle."[13] A whisper of doubt which precariously verges a charge of effeminacy reverberates in the passage which in the last instance states that "that [women]. . .should love to write is no wonder" but "that. . .a. . .gay, lively young fellow. . .who rides, hunts, travels" should do this is "the strange thing", thus identifying the pen with the feminine category of the "domestic and sedentary" (75). It is at this point that one may turn to *A Lover's Discourse* in order to gloss one of its fragments which delineates Woman as a figure of waiting, an expression of immobility, whereas Man represents the fickle vagrant order. "Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys. . ."[14], but feminine sedentariness is not only waiting, it is writing too, and so modifying Barthes's observation one may say: Man hunts, Woman writes. If excessive writing incurs a risk of appearing strange when man does it and thus it is what undoes man, analogically "this man who waits. . .is miraculously feminized".[15]

What invests prodigious writing skill is a rule of reversibility, a readiness to be turned to either strength or weakness, a readiness to participate in the challenge or seduction. If one is to venture any chronological order, then it is challenge that launches seduction, that inevitably brings it in its wake. The challenge, itself a seductive enterprise, engulfs the other with its spellbinding energy which exacts a return (after all, challenge is a call to respond). In Farquhar's *Letters of Love and Business* or in *Clarissa*, it is a return of a letter. The inevitability of the challenge is its irresistibility: "one cannot but respond to it".[16] The letter itself is a challenge: sending a letter Lovelace sends a challenge and it is to a challenge that Clarissa responds by responding to a letter. "In a challenge one draws the other into one's area of strength, which. . .is also his or her area of strength,"[17] writes Baudrillard. This area of strength is language or rather a "knack at letter writing" (161), the sense of which fabricates a misguided conviction (that might be a proof that seduction has already started, that it is well on its deviating way) that one has acquired mastery of language. And to have the upper hand in writing is to assume that one can make it stop at one's command, that with the last stroke of pen one can deliver a decisive blow in a writing duel. It is for that reason that a response is ventured: "I thought I could proceed or stop as I pleased," (381) reflects Clarissa at one point, already seduced by compelling approach of script that cannot but inevitably foster her clandestine correspondence with Lovelace in which "every

[13] Samuel Richardson, *Selected Letters*, ed. J. Carroll (Oxford, 1964), p. 184.

[14] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, tr. R. Howard (Harmondsworth, 1990), pp. 13–14.

[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 82.

[17] Ibid., p. 83.

letter for many letters, intended to be the last" (393). On one's replying to a letter, correspondence is broached and scriptural intercourse commences, and along with it a complicity of exchange. Once embarked upon, correspondence demands it be continued; itself discontinuous, it refuses termination by enticing the writer into a network of obligations, it catches writing on point of no return: the letter absorbs, enwraps the writer into an interminable traffic as one letter spins off another, every gesture, every word or its absence multiply lines in a fold-adding design. It is a fragmentable organisation of correspondence which setting every letter "within a larger configuration" does nevertheless permit it to aspire to a status of "a self-contained entity"[18], yet this ostensible discreteness of correspondence does not translate it into a partible and therefore masterable performance.

Every area of strength is liable to a process of inversion in which it may be turned inside out and made over into an area of weakness; once such a turnaround has occurred and the gift of writing has been read as a symptom of fragility, as a faculty that renders one vulnerable, then challenge changes into seduction. The border between strength and weakness is one between challenge and seduction: "To seduce is to appear weak."[19]

Although the plot of *Clarissa* permits to define it as the seduction novel it is not exactly the letter that is a persistent vehicle of seduction (as Altman justly argues, "the conquest of Clarissa by Lovelace does not take place via correspondence"[20] which is by far too scanty) yet it can be then perceived as its departure point, for it is by means of writing that Lovelace penetrates Harlowe Place. Tracing back the origin of her later ordeal, Clarissa always arrives at "a prohibited correspondence" (409), of which her traumatic situation is a "remote, yet sure consequence" (381). To begin with, Lovelace's presence in the house is metonymic as it is his letters rather than his person that come into the presence of the Harlowes as he insidiously writes his way into the family to whom, at their request, he addresses public, hence open, letters on "the courts and countries he had visited" which are to provide "agreeable amusements in winter evenings" (47) for them. The letters have a general character since they are to be read in full assembly but at the same time Clarissa is singled out of the community of readers when Lovelace's pen appoints her postmistress of these letters, one who is to handle his themes, make commentaries and pose questions according to whose rhythm his texts are to be composed, thus she dictates and amends them at the same time, her writing is beforehand as it forestalls his letters but it also a gloss and postscript to them. This mode of writing, owing to its public status seems to escape the name of exchange, being merely "a kind of correspondence" (47), that is to say it is an exchange that assumes, counterfeits correspondence, or maybe is its preliminary. Correspondence proper begins with a moment of crisis which is also a moment of excess and difference. The distraction occurs when economy of ex-

[18] J. Altman, *Epistolarity*. . ., p. 167.

[19] J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 83.

[20] J. Altman, *Epistolarity*. . ., p. 22.

change is upset and writing runs a surplus: there arrives one letter too many, a private one, enclosed within a public missive, through which not only is the symmetry of correspondence discomposed and division or hierarchy of readers set up, but the whole epistolary circuit becomes confused too. What is enclosed parenthesises writing and relationship by constructing within their respective territories an enclave of privacy which may be ignored and this is how parentheses are often approached: reading passes them by, leaps over their fence, but isolation is an act of privileging too, since "The pleasure of writingt. . .is. . .the pleasure of sharing, but it is also that of leading with [the other] a clandestine existence on the fringe of a social group."[21] The enclosed letter ushers in disorientation, a twist in direction, by placing writing at the cross-roads, making its paths divaricate. And one cannot speak of seduction without rhetoric of confusion or mis-direction: seduction inevitably spells displacement and error (se-ducere: to take aside, to divert from one's path). When Lovelace's script pursues an individual course, when the general subject is interleaved with the particular one ("declaring. . .passionate regards" (47)), it closes as its space contracts itself and becomes more oppressive and particular, yet it opens too by drawing new routes along which writing may unfold. Primarily, the particular letters fail to be acknowledged or taken notice of, they remain unanswered "as if. . .never. . .seen" (48), but when at length they induce the recipient to read them and reply; seduction has already got under way. As the letter is read, recognised, defined as the letter only when one is written into a solitary requital in which the audience, the former reading public, become estranged; the letter leads its privileged reader astray from company of others. The exchange, hitherto watched over and regulated, now slips off the public, prescribed, path and thus begets intimacy. A loss of balance occurs. The family are distanced (71) and withheld from reading: not only does clandestine correspondence disobey law and duty, but it has "a giddy appearance" as well. It comes to signify a frivolous "mere lover-like" writing, but the giddiness defines also a moment of stagger and approach of a fall: the letters gone astray court seduction with which they share the precarious principle of deflection. The off-course writing provokes suit. Woman is to be conquered through yielding to correspondence, a reply to a man's letter ushers in her ruin, jeopardises female integrity as the hymen of her writing becomes riven, is inflicted a tear. On responding, she returns to him, hands herself over. Clarissa's "prohibited correspondence" turns ruinous as it literally opens up her body and identity to a series of violations through which they are made an inscribable and legible territory.

An operation of broaching marks an act of introduction or initiation yet never performed, it seems, without a certain pointed gesture (to broach is first and foremost to stab, pierce, perforate, etc.) invariably at stake of every application of pen to paper, every point of inscription. Blankness of paper, which could be also its lack, its very absence like for instance non-arrival of a desired letter, still

[21] Elisabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives. Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton, 1990), p. 159.

undivided by the point of a pen or defiled with ink connotes a condition of virginity, a state prefatory to the assault of signs and thus a state of resistance to script. To seduce is then to break down resistance of writing. As hesitation of signs becomes mastered and writing takes place, a paper tissue is lacerated in fictive perforation. Breaking the hymen, however, marks at the same time the becoming of the text stitched together by a deft, one might say e-quil-ibrist, manipulation of a pen. Textual space acts as a site for rehearsal of the bodily conquest, the progress of which script both expects and assists. Or perhaps it is writing which is the end of the conquest, its objective but also consummation: paper consummation and thus surrogate and preparatory to the bodily, actual, one.

Małgorzata Nitka

Pismo, list, uwodzenie

Streszczenie

Artykuł ukazuje związki między pisaniem, wymianą listów a uwodzeniem na tle osiemnastowiecznych tekstów epistolarnych, w głównej mierze zaś powieści Samuela Richardsona *Clarissa*. Zależności te są analizowane na podstawie derridiańskiej metafory *hymen* oraz studium uwodzenia dokonanego przez Jeana Baudrillarda. Początkiem, a jednocześnie punktem krytycznym, uwodzenia jest moment odpowiedzi na list, moment, w którym zostaje przełamany opór pisma, i który stanowi tym samym nieuchronną zapowiedź aktu defloracji.

Małgorzata Nitka

Ecriture, lettre, séduction

Résumé

L'article montre les liaisons entre l'écriture, l'échange de lettres et la séduction à propos de textes épistolaires du XVIII[e] siècle et surtout dans le roman *Clarissa* de Samuel Richardson. Ces relations sont étudiées à la base de la métaphore derridienne de l'*hymen* et de l'étude sur la séduction effectuée par Jean Baudrillard. Le début et en même temps le point critique de la séduction est la réponse à la lettre; c'est le moment où l'on rompt la résistance à l'écriture ce qui constitue par là même l'inévitable annonce de l'acte de défloration.

Tadeusz Sławek

"Sunny Flocks" and the "Hollow Pit": Blake's *Book of Thel* and a Question of Sexuality

1.

The frame of the poem (and we cannot let go unnoticed the fact that it is also a frame, a set of covers for the "Book") locates the text between a scene of the sun and that of a tomb. What begins on the meadows where women are tending "their sunny flocks"[1] finishes not only in a general landscape of death ("A land of sorrows & of tears", Pl.4;5) but in a particular place where death becomes MY own demise ("Till to her own grave plot she came", Pl.4;9). At the same time, this topography is marked by a double estrangement – of a person and of voice: in the spectacle of a morning Thel alienates herself from her sisters, do not lead the "sunny flocks" but laments in a detached place. To be more specific, the only thing we hear is "her soft voice": the alienated woman has left the company of other women and remains in an ambiguous relationship with her body which disappears behind her voice.

The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
All but the youngest: she in paleness sought the secret air,
To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day:
Down by the river of Adona her soft voice is heard,
And thus her gentle lamentation falls like morning dew:
She wander'd in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, list'ning
Dolours & lamentations; waiting oft beside a dewy grave
She stood in silence, list'ning to the voices of the ground,
Till to her own grave plot she came, & there she sat down,
And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit.

At the other end of the narrative, Thel dissociates herself from humanity by her decision to explore the sphere of death and from her own voice which is now

[1] W. Blake, "The Book of Thel", in William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 127–130. Further quotations will come from the same edition and will be marked as Pl. (plate number) and a line reference. Quotes from texts other than "Thel" will be marked as *K* plus a page reference.

replaced by a call not hers but uttered from her own grave ("Till to her own grave plot she came, & there she sat down,/ And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit," Pl.4;9–10). What begins as a case of alienation of a human person from his/her kin and of his/her voice from the body ends as an ultimate estrangement from the living and a replacement of the human voice by mourning ("this voice of sorrow") which – stemming from man's final absence ("the hollow pit") – remains in a dubious relationship to man.

A movement of the poem leads us then from morning to mourning, from the sun to a tomb.

2.

We cannot too quickly leave aside the question of voice. For at least two reasons: first, the voice of Thel decisively breaks a convention of the pastoral which links shepherds with singing. As the Music Master explains to Molier's M. Jourdain: "Singing has always been associated with shepherds." Thel either indulges in "gentle lamentation" (Pl.1;5) or in the inarticulate vocal outbursts ("The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek/ Fled back. . .", Pl.4;21); even if we could assume that the former still remains within the orbit of singing performance (Blake's "gentle lamentation" seems to invite such a hypothesis through its similarity to the standard rhetoric of pastoral madrigals which, for instance in Andrea Gabrieli's work, talk about *dolce duol*, a "sweet lament"[2]), the latter certainly radically undermines such a possibility.

Second, the vocal pronouncement which concludes the poem, the utterance of the "hollow pit", is not just a voice but "THIS voice [emphasis added]" where the pronoun highlights its object not merely in terms of deixis but also as a final destination, a thing towards which the whole process of expecting and reflecting is directed. THIS not only prepares us for the enunciation to come (where its function resembles that of the "following") but also announces the arrival of the long expected, the actualization of something which was anticipated (as in a phrase, "and finally came this man" uttered after a long period of intense waiting).

The ambiguities of THIS "voice" prepare us for the dilemmas of narcissism: if one has to come to terms with the voice of the "hollow pit" before one understand one's being and identity, then the voice must necessarily come simultaneously from outside and inside of myself (is "my" grave truly, and if so then in what way, "mine", and who is this "I" to whom this grave "belongs"?). Godard is right when he claims that Thel's denial of life paves a way for Freud's analyses ("This narcissistic denial of life provides a rich anticipation. . .of Freud's theories about the development of consciousness, conversion of libido, and formation of Anticathexes"[3]), but when

[2] Quoted in H. M. Brown, "The Madrigalian and the Formulaic in Andrea Gabrieli's 'Pastoral Madrigals' ", in *The Pastoral Landscape*, ed. J. D. Hunt (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1992), p. 91.

[3] J. Godard, *Mental Forms Creating. William Blake Anticipates Jung, and Rank* (New York: University Press of America, 1985), p. 46.

unequivocally describing Thel as "the incurable adult narcissist [who is] unable to accept mortality through sexuality"[4]), he does not see what we will be trying to demonstrate in this essay – that there is an inherent and inexorable narcissism which constitutes the very mechanism of desire and which cannot be totally overcome by the acting out of passions.

At the end of the soft voice of gentle lamentation there is always THIS voice of the hollow pit which goes beyond the clear identity marking strategies and in which I hear myself speak from the realm of death, in which "I" no longer can identify myself as an "I" (but neither can I categorically deny that there is no link between this voice and "me") and, therefore, it will be better to say (purposefully and inevitably transcending the discipline of grammar) *that in THIS voice "I" hear oneself speak* (where "oneself" refers to this non-identifiable speaker who/which only through its topography of death suggests itself as an "I").

3.

The deictic pronoun announces a thing that only partly becomes available for me: I can hear it but its visibility is permanently sealed off. Thel does not see who is speaking from the hollow pit, and the phrase "THIS voice" doubly deludes our attention: first, because it indicates an object which manifests itself to us only in part, only through a synocdoche, second, because despite its deictic character the pronoun can only indecisively suggest some object without naming it, can only make a gesture towards it without bringing it fully to our presence. THIS both points out the object and shows it to be unavailable for any specific naming; THIS replaces the name of the object which defies appellation.

THIS is where the inarticulate darkness emerges to the light of language without reaching the positivity of a substantive.

4.

We are facing the problem of loss: at the end, the deprivation is easily definable (death, splintering of the self which no longer controls what is and is not his/hers – "This voice" speaks from Thel's grave while she – still alive – listens to its pronouncements), at the beginning of the poem the loss is less specific. It does not convey the threat of death but yet its work is no less perturbing. One could detect in it a working of a paradoxical mechanism which enhances our concern with reality only to bring about the effect of disappointment and ultimate lack of interest in the external world. The drama of Thel is that of a melancholic as described by Freud in his 1917 essay on "Mourning and Melancholia" where melancholia is characterized as "a profoundly pain-

[4] Ibid., p. 46.

ful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings. . .".[5]

But, as we have said, in one of these characteristics Blake takes a different course from Freud: Thel's melancholia seems to derive less from the "abrogation if interest in the outside world" and more from a sudden disruption of the temporal scheme which reveals the abysses of nothingness within the previously predetermined operations of time. In such a process of unsettlement time empties out and leaves nothing but void.

Before Thel comments upon the mortality of man, i.e. on the passage of time as the device of death, she is keenly aware of the passage of time as a process of becoming and production. Before time begins to signify death ("Why fade these children of the spring"), it intimates life ("O life of this our spring!"). What in the pastoral tradition appears as a critical moment in the sequence of time in which mourning is overcome (a new life of spring replacing the stagnancy and grief of winter, as in Blake's juvenile poem dedicated to "Spring" in which we read about the season coming "upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee [spring]", *K*,1) now is presented as a point at which grief begins: love-sickness is not cured by spring but awakened by the sense of loss which inheres in the presence(s) of life. A grief announced by Thel concerns the premonition of loss which, as yet, remains unknown but which modifies the world and presents it as the doubly unfulfilled erotic: the loss is represented as a purely disembodied vocal phenomenon which, additionally, is ascribed to "evening", a time of waning and decline ("I lay me down. . . and gentle hear the voice/ Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time").

A distortion of the erotic results from the unspecified loss which will have taken place in the future but which is being already enacted now in the phenomenal world.

5.

Let us again turn to Freud who diagnoses the disturbing uncertainty at the heart of melancholia. Whereas mourning and grief always allow us to determine its cause, melancholia is the symptom of the loss which remains unnamed: "The unknown loss in melancholia would also result in an inner labour of the same kind [as grief]. . . Only the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that absorbs him so entirely."[6]

Freud's emphasis on the unavailibility of the cause of melancholia must in case of Thel be concerned with the literal understanding of that which cannot be seen and is anticipated as an alien time pocket developing within the tem-

[5] In S. Freud, *Collected Papers*, Authorized Translation under the Supervision of Joan Riviere. Vol. 4 (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 153.

[6] Ibid., p. 155.

poral "now" (an "evening" envisioned in a "morning") and as a mere voice ("of him that walketh in the garden in the evening" and "of sorrow"). But it is significant that, unlike Freud's melancholic, Thel does not sever her links with the world, and the crisis of her relationship with reality is not so much due to the "abrogation of interest" as to the intense problematization of the connection between herself and the Other. Thel's melancholy enacts a complicated drama in which, on the one hand, one recognizes the relentless necessity of the Other and, on the other hand, one is not certain whether the Other precedes the formation of one's self or is a result of the self's solidification. A series of Thel's philosophical interjections testifies to this uncertain location of melancholy between the grieving for the absence of the Other and the narcissistic confirmation of one's exclusivity for which the Other is only needed as a reflecting mirror. In her questions Thel certainly struggles with mortality, but this is not merely a reflection of despair over the inevitability of dying; more importantly, it is an examining of time as an element in which one constantly "dies" in his/her relationships with the Other, in which man reaffirms his/her identity through a nervous repetition of a personal pronoun which is answered by the indefiniteness ("no one") of of the absent partner ("I pass away: yet I complain, and no one hears my voice", Pl.3,4) and which however leaves behind it nothing but emptiness ("I vanish . . . and who shall find my place?", Pl.2,12). The senses "allure humanity to sexual pleasure, though that pleasure is also a part of the inevitable destruction of the body in its mortal day".[7]

The placelessness of man who realizes that the relationship with the Other must be preceded by the recognition of one's self as a realm of "death" (see Clod of Clay and her "My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark", Pl.4,12).

In the absence of the Other one has to "die" oneself in order to provide for the otherwise unidentifiable cause for sense of loss and thus a melancholy process of dejection is as much a self-reprobation as it is a self-mourning.

6.

There are three responses to Thel's querries which reveal certain common features. All three of them are based on the principle of recognized weakness which is redeemed by the investing of energy into objects other than the speaking subject. The Lilly of the valley is "very small" and "so weak, the gilded butterfly scarce perches" on it (Pl.1;16,18) but it "nourishes the innocent lamb" (Pl.2;5); the Cloud "passes away", but it bears "food to all our tender flowers"(Pl.3;10,16); the Clod of Clay presents itself as "the meanest thing", but she "bow[s] over the weeping infant" in a gesture of solicitude (Pl.4;11,8). This economy in which weakness is a source of power makes it also clear that this empowerment does not come from

[7] J. Howard, *Infernal Poetics. Poetic Structures in Blake's Lambeth Prophecies* (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 52 .

the being itself but from a larger force; hence the Lilly is "visited from heaven" (Pl.1;18), the Cloud is overwhelmed by the "raptures holy" (Pl.3;11), and the Clod of Clay is exalted by "he, that loves the lowly" and who "pours his oil upon my head" (Pl.5;1).

The answers come then all not only from the perspective of the openness to the Other but, more dramatically, from the position of one who has been overcome and engulfed by the all powerful Other. If Thel enquires about the purpose of human life, then the three answers suggest that one's existence is justifiable only on the ground of it being claimed by a force over which one has no control.

The Other is one who/which descends and who/which equips being with a purpose which is not being's but which either belongs to the domain of public use ("bearing food to all our tender flower", Pl.3;16) *which also includes death* ("The if thou art the food of worms. . .How great thy use. . .", Pl.3;25), *or eschatological plan of salvation* ("thou shalt be clothed in light", Pl.1;23).

7.

Thel's resistance to this philosophy and her retreat to melancholia seem to stem from three sources. First, she refuses to see herself and her being as measured in the categories of "use", at least, she cannot find for herself the equivalents of the "uses" all her interlocutors talk about. She can see the purpose of the Lilly but the ontology of her being cannot find access to this kind of purposiveness (having sketched the design of the pragamatic uses of the Lilly she exclaims: "But Thel is like a faint cloud. . .I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall find my place?," Pl.2;12).

Second, she cannot find a middle path between the category of "use" and the temporal structure of being which seems to prempty any pragmatic discourse of "functions" and "applications". In a characteristic answer to Cloud's exhortation Thel clearly lets know that her melancholy does not arise from questioning the very category of "use", but, rather, from its incommensurability with man's temporal character. Time puts "use" under erasure and what is at stake is a possibility of working out a philosophy which would reformulate this category, produce its meaning different from a mere scheme of pragmatic usages, natural causes and effects represented poetically in the Cloud's rendition of the water circulation process ("The weeping virgin ["the fair eyed dew"] trembling kneels before the risen sun,/ Till we arise link'd in a golden band. . .bearing food to all our tender flowers", Pl.3;13–15). Thel responds to this with "But Thel delights in these no more because I fade away" (Pl.3;21) where the "no more" clearly allows us to see that the scheme of purposes and "uses" delineated by the Cloud is not alien to her but perceived as one which has exhausted its potential.

Third, the sense of some ontological menace and resulting melancholy is amplified by the crisis of knowledge protocols which no longer seem to fulfil their contract on the strength of which they are to provide man with a network of pro-

cedures ordering the world and making it comprehensible. Thel, referred to as a "pensive queen" (Pl.3;29), is not satisified with the answers because the submissiveness from which they stem implies the futility of knowledge which is replaced by the acceptance expressed best by the Clod's statement "I know not, and I cannot know,/ I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love" (Pl.5;5–6). The revelation of man's temporality invalidating the elaborate scheme of natural and social "uses" prevents Thel from approving of this solution; in the situation of melancholia one can be saved neither by knowledge nor by ignorance ("Alas! I knew not this...", Pl.5;8) as both responses are paralyzed by the inability to formulate a language, an articulate, rational discourse which would be in a position to deal with the purposiveness of being which transcending the structure of biological or human needs, causes and effect can only very imprecisely be addressed as "shining" ("Without a use this shining woman liv'd" Pl.3;22; "I...leave my shining lot", Pl.5;13).

Thel's melancholia which marks the disturbance in the sphere of relationships between her and the Other is also a sign of a crisis of rationality which does not reject knowledge but looks for a new discourse which would be able to inscribe man again within a structure of meaningful relations with the Other and recognize independence of both sides from the social and biological immediate "uses".

8.

The problem of "use" and "purpose" implicates Blake's protagonist in a situation delineated by Kantian aesthetics. Having asked himself in the Third Movement of the Analytic of the Beautiful a question "What is a purpose?", Kant procedes to link the notion of the purpose with that of a cause ("a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause"[8]) and then, moving towards a judgment of taste, announces that aesthetic pleasure originates in a discovery, in the semiotic aspect of work, of the purposiveness without purpose which is the way in which an object offers itself to us (". . .the liking. . .can be nothing but the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of an object, without any purpose. . .and hence the mere form of purposiveness. . .in the presentation by which an object is given us"[9]). Thel's dilemma consists in her inability to find a formula for the "mere purposiveness" which would go beyond the concepts and "uses" of the purpose as defined in cognitive judgments.

In fine, Thel's melancholia derives from (an oddly Nietzschean touch in a Kantian interpretation) *the impossibility of finding an aesthetic formula for human life. A viable suggestion if we remember about Blake's insistence upon creative impulse as a formative power of man's ethical structure* ("A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian," *K*,776).

[8] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 64.
[9] Ibid., p. 66.

9.

To use a pair of terms introduced by Kant in 16 paragraph of the same Analytic, we could also say that Thel on the one hand remains within the realm of "accessory beauty" (*pulchritudo adhaerens*) with its conviction that "the beauty of a human being. . .does presuppose the concept of the purpose. . .and hence a concept of its perfection. . ."[10]), on the other hand however, she tries in her constant probings to move towards "free beauty" (*pulchritudo vaga*) where "we presuppose no concept of any purpose".[11] The very impossibility of solving the problem, of not being able to either remain in the sphere of purpose or radically move beyond it is coded in the protagonist's name; "Thel" may be derived from a Greek word signifying "will"[12] which operates both on the level of a self-assertive desire ("I desire something") and an external scheme of targets ("I desire *something*"). As Kant recognizes it, such a positioning of will sends it back to the domain of purpose: "The power of desire, insofar as it can be determined to act only by concepts, i.e. in conformity with the presentation of a purpose, would be the will".[13]

Other etymologies suggested for the name of Thel hint at its close connection with the notion of "delay" or "hang in doubt" (from the Hebrew t e l a) or f r a g i l e transitoriness (the Hebrew *Thel* meaning "dew") thus suggesting either her indecisiveness or the paralysing sense of mortality. A link between Thel and "dew" gets additional support from the early sections of the poem where the Lilly refers to her being "clothed in the morning manna" which may thus be an allusion implicating Thel as an "ornament", a "dress" of nature, something that hides and covers while, ironically, simultaneosuly looking for the "naked truth".
Mark Schorer enhances the centrality of the death motif by linking the name of Blake's protagonist with a d i s t o r t e d r e a d i n g of the subterraneous river Lethe which supports his interpretation of the poem as a neoplatonic drama of a reluctant birth ("Thel [is her name to suggest Lethe?] is an unborn spirit unwiling to enter life, yet she knows, as her first two questions indicate that if she is to learn the lesson of Experience, she must mix with its inhabitants").

J. Howard, *Infernal Poetics. Poetic Structures in Blake's Lambeth Prophecies* (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 51;
M. Schorer, *William Blake. The Politics of Vision* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 202.

Thel operates within the irreducible difference between the aesthetic and the ethical: in the former she wants to abandon the concept of "purpose" and "use" (and remain in the sphere of "presentations"), *in the latter she is constantly reminded about the impossibility of evading "purpose"; thus the dilemma shifts from the mere deciding between the two towards locating a chance for the mediation, a protocol of knowing and living which would enable man to accept the purpose for what it is – an operation of will as modified by concepts* (if Thel stands for "will", her interlocutors present the varieties of reasonableness).

[10] Ibid., p. 77.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See M. L. Johnson, J. E. Grant, *Blake's Poetry and Designs* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 61.
[13] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 65.

10.

Thel's melancholia is a disease of purpose, or rather, a dis-ease of purpose, i.e. a position in which one feels ill at ease with one's own life as oriented towards generally recognized purposes, a position where a purpose is perceived as alienated from myself (whereas the guides insist on the total internalization of their "purposes" which are actualized without mediation of knowledge and reflection, Thel repeatedly notices a fissure between herself and the "uses"). And where the notion of the purpose has been mentioned the social cannot be far away, whereas Thel's "use" applied to the female life prompts the proximity of the sexual. It is to the garden scene that we have to turn to reconnoitre these two aspects and their common denominator – productivity.

Thel's complaints clearly refer to the purpose from the perspective of some "useful" labour. Having delineated for herself the "uses" of the Lilly, she, in a stark contrast, projects the image of her own uselessness (or, Kant's term, "unpurposiveness"): "But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun" (Pl.2;11). The conclusion of her barrenness is even more straightforward in the exchange with the Cloud : "But I feed not the little flowers. . .I feed not the warbling birds. . ." (Pl.3;19–20). A problematic relationship with work and its traditional system of connections in which family was closely affiliated with the division of labour and the structure of consumption (via the law of primogeniture, for instance, not an indifferent fact, perhaps, if one remembers that Thel is a daughter and "the youngest" which facts alienate her from the structure of inheritance) cannot be a neutral factor in a poem which begins with a triple renunciation: of the unquestionable loyalty to the family (she separates herself from her kin), of work which one has been allotted in the process of the division of labour (Thel refuses to "lead sunny flocks", like her sisters), and of the established ideal of the feminine behaviour ("paleness" defying models of beauty as well as a rebelious mien unbecoming of a young female):

> The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks,
> All but the youngest: she in paleness sought the secret air,
> To fade away like morning beauty from her mortal day. . .
> Pl.1;1–3

The garden pastoral scenery envoked at the beginning of the poem, then systematically assaulted by Thel's rejection of internalizing of natural purposes as her own, and finally deconstructed by the graveyard imagery of the final episode, poses two fundamental problems: (1) of the social consequences of the model of the "unproductive" existence in which the adjective "shining" (used by Thel to describe her life) refers not to the ontological quality of being (like in Heidegger's analyses) but serves as a description of a mere polish of cultivation which lacks social "purpose"; (2) of the functioning of productivity on the level of human sexuality where it finds its extension in the ethics of nourishment and maternal care.

A mention of "Adona" is also linked with the rhythmic changes of seasons and, in this way, also related to the motifs of the pastoral aesthetics and ethics which Blake discusses in the poem. A succinct illustration of the motif is to be found in the First Book of *Paradise Lost* where, in a feat of poetic anthropology, Milton combines the story of amorous conquest (Astaroth) with that of death and decay, or to use Thel's phrase, "fading away", only to present Christianity as their overcoming:

"Her Temple on th' offensive Mountain, built
By that uxorious King, whose heart though large,
Beguil'd by fair Idolatress, fell
To idols foul. Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allur'd
The Syrian Damsels to lament his fate
In amorous dityyes all a summer day,
While smooth Adonis from his native Rock
Ran purple to the Sea, suppos'd with blood
Of Thammuz yearly wounded: the Love-tale
Infected Sion's daughters with like heat,
Whose wanton passions in the sacred Porch
Ezekiel saw, when by the Vision led
His eye survey'd the dark Idolatress
Of ancient Judah."

J. Milton, "Paradise Lost", Book I, ll. 443–457, in J. Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. H. Beechie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938).

Thel, referred to in the poem five times as a "virgin" and three times as a "maid", inhabits a space which even before the final slippage into the churchyard scenery is infected by death as an essential element of the amorous longing. The scene of lamentation takes place "Down by the river of Adonis" (Pl.1;4) which in two ways conjures the scene of death: first, it evokes the presence of Adonis and thus draws upon the incommensurability of love as divine energy and human mortality (Adonis was a mortal lover of Venus), second, by a detour leading us through the first Book of *Paradise Lost*, it summons the scene where women mourn a dying god. A corellation between the movement within the erotic (from Eros towards Thanatos) and a shift in the spatial design (from a garden to a graveyard) is a central theme in the poem.

It translates the sexual from the discourse of aesthetic and social conventional eroticism of taste (the erotic as a social game as shown in Boucher and Restoration Comedy) *and measure* (sexual relationship as an economic transaction) *into the domain of ethical question of the openness towards the other* (desire as a force which refuses to be accomodated by the socially and aesthetically articulate discourses and reaches out towards the sphere of death and suffering).

11.

What happens in *The Book of Thel* is then a major transformation of the sexual which, from the level of an ego gratificatory strategic game, becomes open to a serious probing of a question of the Other. As we have said, a shift in the spatial arrangement is central in this respect as it allows us to trace Blake's critique of a fashionable aesthetics of the picturesque culminating in the garden architecture theory of the day. One can claim that the picturesque of self is replaced by the sublimity of the other (one of Blake's proverbs of hell maintains that "The most

sublime act is to set another before you", *K*,151). A retreat from the picturesque is a withdrawal from what is merely visually pleasing towards what shatters, through the experience of displeasure, the conventional stability of vision. Cochin, in 1759, defines the picturesque as a careful balancing of elements which achieves the standard of naturalness and its purposiveness of action which is, however, invisibly subtended by the artificiallity of the artist's intervention: "It is what is distributed so as to render natural attitudes in their most pleasing aspect without losing anything of the truthfulness of the action. . . ."[14] Thel's move towards the tomb explodes the pastoral picturesqueness of the "sunny flocks" and disrupts the corellation between the "most pleasing aspect" and the "truthfulness of action".

Such a disruption inheres also in human sexuality which finds its ultimate representation in the final episode of the poem. Thel learns the lesson of the erotic from the sorrowful voice of the hollow pit having first listened to two stories of usefulness (Lilly's and Cloud's) and then having confronted the problem of maternity (Clod of Clay) which itself introduced a different tone into the presentation of the child. The infant appears as a worm ("Is this a Worm? I see thee lay helpless & naked," Pl.4;4) which has previously been shown as a part of the iconography of death ("did she only live to be at death the food of worms?", Pl.3;23); There is at least a triple significance in the image of the worm: first, it directly implicates sexuality in the scene of death thus problematizing again the question of productivity and "use"; second, it interrogates the expressivity and carefree joyfulness traditionally attached to sex in the eighteenth-century aristocratic culture. "Ah! weep not, little voice, thou canst not speak, but thou canst weep" (Pl.4;3) – the worm is speechless (thus casting doubt upon the tradition of pastoral erotic poetry and expressivity) and able to produce only an inarticulate discourse of mourning (hence displacing the unproblematic character of sexual fulfilment). Third, a worm could also insinuate sexuality in a different way: through its etymology relating it to both to a dragon and the seraphim (let us remember that Thel is a daughter of Mne Seraphim and thus a daughter of a passion and a serpent, a child of the sexual impulse which must rediscover its power) it evokes the sacred (Christ is a serpent in the Orphic doctrine) and thus would give a theological sanction to the union of the sexes which, however, in keeping with Blake's unorthodox views, would support the transgressive, alternative interpretation of divinity as overtly sexualized ("Blake may have known of the Orphite gnostic cosmologies which identified the serpent with Christ. It is also conceivably relevant that a second traditional etymology of 'seraph' traces it to *sa ra ph* translated in the Authorized Version as 'fiery flying serpent' (e.g. Isaiah 14.29)"[15].

The worm as a critique of expressivity and articulacy is also a renegotiation of the standard sexual symbols which in the tradition of eighteenth-century art

[14] In M. Sheriff, *Fragonard. Art and Eroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 83.

[15] M. Ferber, "Blake's Thel and the Bride of Christ", *Blake Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 and 2 (1980), p. 55.

frequently linked the controlled naturalness of the garden with the images of aggressive domination. The initial scenery of Blake's poem is that of Fragonard's garden paintings. In a series of four panels in the Detroit Institute of Arts Fragonard compiles a classic anthology of the horticultural motifs corellating the garden with sexuality. Without aiming at a detailed analysis, let us only note five things of importance for our discussion of Blake. First, a privileging of the activist male element of Spring (*The Gardener*) and Summer (*The Harvester*) which displace the conventional feminine embodiments of the two seasons. Second, a removal of the feminine to the domain of Autumn (*The Grape Gatherer*) and Winter (*The Wanderer*) and its close affiliation with the female productivity (children) which emphasizes fertility but then, with the accent on the withering and decline of productive force shifts most of formative energies of spring and summer unto the realm of the masculine.

Mary Sheriff provides us with a more detailed reading of sexual imagery in the Fragonard series whose "pastoralized seasons also imply an analogy between the natural cycle and human sexuality". Thus, we read about *The Gardener* that "In his extended right hand he holds the bird, a well established image of the male genitals. . .the spout is positioned below the bird so as to point toward the young man's pubic area, which is further emphasized by the knot at his waist. We can thus discern a triangular configuration of three points – bird, spout, and knot – that converge on erogenous zone. . .at a distance from the bird, the gardener holds a sign of the female, a basket filled with the flowers that identify the season. Although the configuration of the main symbols suggests that the actual coupling has not yet occurred, the other object lying at the gardener's feet, the rake, may point towards the activities to come: 'to rake' (*ratisser*) was a euphemism for coition. Finally, the entwined trees bending over the figure also suggest the impending union."

M. Sheriff, *Fragonard. Art and Eroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 103, 109.

Third, whereas the Spring and Summer are the time of production (or insemination), it is important to notice that this takes place due not so much to the operation of natural powers but to the action of implements and tools (a scythe, a rake, a watering can) which differentiate the masculine reality from the female world of "matural" production (see the baby lying on the ground in the Autumn panel, as if to suggest its "growth" from soil). The male world is that of utensils and instruments, of mechanisms of control; the female space belongs to the sphere of "natural" enjoyment, and the word "labour" seems to slip in this context away from the toil and pain of child-bearing process (shown as a natural, easy, painless occurrence) to comfortably nest in the male world of scientific instrumentality.

Fourth, the fourth panel representing winter finalizes the movement of seasons as it shows the feminine as the itinerant force expunged from the domain of the settled and human (most fully hinted at in the Spring panel in the details of man-made garden architecture); the series of seasons ends with the expulsion from the realm of territorialized existence and labour (from Blake's meadows of "sunny flocks") which reflects the banishment of Adam and Eve from the paradise with a caveat that this time it is only Eve who is exiled from the garden domain of the male productivity. The scene of expulsion is in Fragonard a literal movement of

expatriation, a removal from the father-land, a banishment from the father, a dislogment from the regulated productivity and territorializing social roles.

Fifth, the frontal position of the woman suggests the act of offering which, in turn, implies that the eviction from the male world will cease and the paternal paradise will be retrieved on condition of the seductive offering carried out from the position of total subservience (the woman is shown as an itinerant, picturesque beggar).

Thel's refusal to comply with the role imposed upon her by the parental authority leads eventually to the collapse of the garden scenery and its replacement by the "hollow pit", but such a movement also implies an activation of the energies of the "Contraries" which disrupt the conventional parcelling and territorializing of gender roles and its accompanying modes of fertility (hence, for instance Thel refusal to tend the "sunny flocks" and her problematic attitude towards maternity). A replacement of the garden by the "valleys dark" is also an act of a sympathetic understanding for the social transformation which cannot be incidental if we remember that the date of *The Book of Thel* coincides with the outbreak of the French Revolution. A movement not absent from the late Fragonard of his *Fete at Saint-Cloud* (1774) where a nature of the picturesque gives way to a world of darker premonitions and turbulent powers of the uncontrollable outburst of natural (and social) forces. "The props in his painting appear in paintings by others. . .But Fragonard was a visually intelligent man with urgent emotions. In this painting, he takes a traditional motif, the fete, and invests it with a new meaning to correspond to his intimations of a waning cohesion. The fallen trees were cultivated by man who hoped to dominate nature through artifice. We do not know, in Fragonard's painting, whether man or nature overturned these comely trees. We can only feel the melancholy that these supine living objects induce."[16]

The melancholy of Thel and the dejection noticeable in the shift of the scenery from the picturesque garden to the terrifying "hollow pit" speak not only of the crumbling of ontological grounding of man and its supplementary aesthetic force of the horticulturalist ordering of nature by artifice but also of the abyssmal origin of a new order which in his voice of sadness was announcing the epoch of the political revolutionary terror ("Fragonard painted this embellishment for a rich man's house at a time when the social order was being questioned on every side. . .The world of forms was being expanded despite the new regime's effort to control it ever more strictly"[17]). From this perspective, the act of abandoning her herds acquires a significance which is transgressive both politically and religiously: the "flocks" are let loose, liberated from the authority of the shepherd, and the adjective "sunny" qualifying the flocks may refer to the features of Christ thus opening a possibility of commenting upon Thel's quest as a critique of Christian orthodoxy mainatined by the Lilly, Cloud, and Clod: "Thel the sherpherd-

[16] D. Ashton, *Fragonard in the Universe of Painting* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), p. 173.

[17] Ibid.

ess has left her charge by the second line of the poem and so she has risked eternal life in the love of Christ in order to question her role. . .The three creatures she talks to all tell the same tale. . .that by selfless love one will attain an intimate union with, a marriage, with the sunlike Christ."[18] The denial of "sunny flocks" can then be looked upon as (1) a refutation of the concept of the imposed duty (even if the duty in question has to do with exercise of care and tenderness), and (2) as a denial of Christ as an intimate, though mystical, partner; a disavowal of the physical body turns out to be a rejection of the spiritual Body. The first perspective is liberating as it allows Thel to ask questions, i.e. to investigate the possibility of acquiring her own knowledge ("It is precisely Thel's insistence on asking questions and striving for knowledge which identifies her as the only fully human character in the poem"[19]).

Thus *The Book of Thel* can be read as a critique of conceptual knowledge which causes the paralysis of the life impulse and mispresents being as a one sided process in which man is a victim of destruction and thus introduce a state of arrest in which man is unable to experience pleasure. Thel is unable to listen to the questions because her attention, motivated by the western knowledge formation protocols, expects answers perpetuating the already holding solutions. Blake's protagonist is left speechless (which is a situation she finds unbearable) in front of the knowledge which (un)founded upon the principle of "Gelassenheit" which does not require the elaborate reconstruction of causal links. In Angelus Silesius we read "Die Ros' ist ohn' Warum; sie bluhet, weil sie bluhet, / Sie acht't nicht ihr selbst, fragt nicht, ob man sie siehet", and another great Silesian mystic Daniel Czepko adds in a poem explicitly called *Ohn Ursache*: "Die Sonne scheint. Warumb? Sie schein, weil sie muss scheinen, / Ihr Art zwingt sie dazu. So solt du Gott bloss meinen." See also a sudden intervention from Magritte's notes: "I don't know the reason (if there is one) for living or dying."

A. Silesius, *Le Pelerin Cherubinique* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1964), Vol. 1, p. 136; Vol. 2, p. 61;
H. Torczyner, *Magritte: The True Art of Painting* (New York: Abradale Press, 1979), p. 76.

The other outlook shows that her attempt at forming a new type of cognizance shuts out, prematurely, sexuality and thus, from the very beginning reduces the chances of the whole operation and opens an wide thoroughfare along which repression moves from the sexual to other areas of being ("To Blake and Yeats sexual repression is at the root of political aggression and revolution. . .The cannot achieve the vision of Eternity until she becomes disintegrated and re-integrated in the process of experience, having accepted the vision of the Marriage. Wisdom is not found above the clouds but in the suffering of the pit"[20].)

The voice from the "hollow pit" is a pronouncement of the uncontrollable force which disturbs the system of sensual perception and ordering of social exchange by uncovering a mechanism of difference in what previously was constituted as a, supposedly, one homogeneous body (social and individual).

[18] M. Ferber, "Blake's Thel and the Bride of Christ", *Blake Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 and 2, (1980) p. 48.

[19] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 88.

[20] R. Billigheimer, *Wheels of Eternity. A Comparative Study of William Blake and W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), pp. 23–24.

12.

A series of questions articulated by the "voice of sorrow" precedes two important events in the text. First, it predates Thel's response to them which looks like an escapist gesture ("The Virgin. . . with a shriek/ Fled back. . . into the vales of Har", Pl.6; 21–22). Second, it antecedes the vignette which frames the text and which is overtly sexual in its phallic imagery of a woman straddling a writhing body of a serpent). It seems that considering the presence of the engraving (which, if we realize its position between the body of the text and the ultimate closing of "The End", can function as a summary of

"Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
"Or the glist'ning Eye to the poison of a smile?
"Why are Eyelids stor'd with arrows ready drawn,
"Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
"Or an Eye of gifts & graces show'ring fruits & coined gold?
"Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
"Why an Ear, a whirpool fierce to draw creations in?
"Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror, trembling, & affright?
"Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
"Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?"
The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek
Fled back unhinder'd till she came into the vales of Har.

Fig. 1. The End

the argument) sexuality gains priority in the debate, and hence the last two questions acquire a particular importance (one cannot pass indifferently the fact that some copies do not have these lines which must have been deleted by Blake himself on request of a prospective buyer for whom they must have appeared to be too controversial): "Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?/ Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?" (Pl.6;19–20). These inquiries appear at the end of the interrogation which, without providing any answers, seems to present human existence as profoundly opened and vulnerable to destruction. In fact, the very rhetorical form of this philosophy of vulnerability constitutes one of its ideological cornerstones: where there is no answer, there can be no solidity of foundations, no affirmative or negative statements which could be used by general indicators or signposts to follow by the individual. The question both enfeebles and strengthens the social sphere; the enfeeblement comes from the subversive role the question plays vis à vis social conventions and routines which always assume the form of answers (like in a book of catechism), the strengthening derives from the rejuvenation of the social energy produced by the individual effort to slough off the superficial aspects of sociability.

The question problematizes the social ordering of the answer and, in turn, prepares the ground for a new social contract which would not be founded upon a mere restrictive operations of Blake's "One Law", the situation clearly depicted by Blake in his "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" centered on the doctrine of moral/bodily "impulse" rather than premeditated "rules" (*K*,158) (this is strikingly evident in Nietzsche's verdict of the Death of God followed, in the 125th aphorism of *The Gay Science*, by a list of questions as new non-affirmative non-indicators given to humanity, and in Blake's famous poem *The Tyger* where the identity of God is allowed to be probed only in the rhetorical mask of the question).

13.

There are two things that need to be said about the voice's sorrowful interrogation. First, that the destructiveness to which being is vulnerable through its sensual structure is, at least in part, balanced by pleasurability of impressions ("Eye of gifts & graces", "Tongue impress'd with honey") and also by the fact that the senses not only are mere channels through which being is available for "destruction" but also means of destroying ("An Ear a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in"). The essence of our vulnerability: we perform destructive operations while being, at the same time, ourselves destroyed. This certainly refers also to the sphere of the sexual which either brings about the crisis provoked by a contrast between eroticism and mortality, or – when repressed through, for instance, family politics – a predicament of repression. In the former case, one is opened unto the other but must (which Thel cannot do) remain affirmative about death and suffering (i.e. according to later Freud in his *Problems of Anxiety*, about a possibility of castration, a fear by no means limited to the male sex); the latter condition involves a process in which the "repressed libido produces a deflection from the sexual aim so that love is experienced as depletion and the re-enrichment of the ego can be affected only by a withdrawal of libido from its objects".[21] The sublimity

An interplay of the ethics of beauty, of the pastoral, and pleasure based on closure and that of sublimity of suffering and death founded upon opening; a move from the "sunny flocks" to the "hollow pit" followed by a return which suggests that the latter is always present in the former. Not only Bataille in his doctrine of the black sun but also Rene Magritte knew this truth. His 1938 painting *The Beyond* shows the sun suspended in the anonymous and unidentifiable sky above the tomb which fills the foreground: a landscape which synthesizes that of Blake's *Book of Thel* with its movement from the "river of Adona" to the "valleys dark". Yet another aspect of Blake's thought – death is a part of sexual experience, there is no sun which would not shine upon a tombstone. Magritte: "In answer to the sun, I have come up with: a tomb. . . the problem of the sun. It was death, indeed, so that it is not possible for fruitless doubts to arise." Additional argument behind Blake's critique of doubt: if the poet launches a bitter attack against Bacon and Newton as prophets of doubt, it is also for this reason – they represented the binary thought of oppositions which did not allow for the discovery of death (of anus, of vagina) in the sun but kept the two strictly apart as the deist theology turned God into a deus absconditus.

H. Torczyner, *Magritte. Ideas and Images* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1977), p. 122.

[21] D. H. George, *Blake and Freud* (London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 95.

of sexual ethics implies a necessary confrontation with suffering and loss which, however, does not lead to the narcissistic turning towards one's own self but to the affirmative acceptance of evanescence. Thel relies on two different solutions: first, she (in her complaints) rejects the very idea of mortality and the possibility of loss, second, she grasps the sense of death impulse in the language of the senses but returns to the previous situation this time, however, aware of the confrontation with terror. She returns to the ethics of closure which has already been punctured by the inarticulacy of her response ("a shriek"). Thel is presented in the border situation in which narcissism evolves towards the opening through which the object of desire is shown either as the other (with the inevitable element of loss and death) or, as we shall see, as the self-critical work of desire upon itself ("Thel is at the very point of embracing mortality through sexuality, poised on the brink of transferring libido from self to object"[22]).

Thel's escape at the end of the poem is an attempt to evade the violence constitutive of being; in aesthetic terms – to circumvent the ethics of sublimity (of "whirlpool", "terror" met with "trembling and affright") *in which suffering plays an essential role by turning towards the pastoral ethics of the picturesque* (suggested in the opening section by the shepherd, pastor-like, occupations of "leading sunny flocks") *which, however, now contains a possibility of the other either as a physical other or its equivalent enclosed in the very structure of* (see point 15).

14.

The second observation refers to the opening pronoun (out of ten lines spoken by the voice "from the hollow pit" seven begin with "why"). Questions posed in this manner want to establish a certain order in which answers arrange themselves in a view of the world regulated by the relationship of cause and effect ("why?/ because"). The sense and "use" of being is measured in terms of causation and its rationality. But if this is the case, then Thel's panic and "shriek" is a sign of the frustration effectuated by a series of questions which invalidate themselves by not proposing, nor leaving any room for, an answer.

Marginally, let us note the importance of inarticulacy, and thus of a muted, distorted speech in alternative discourses of rebellion (rock'n'roll) and art. It is significant that "inspired by Freud's analyses Dali frequently portrayed himself without a mouth (*The Great Masturbator*, 1929; *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931); this symbolised his own impotence by equating his mouth with the closed female genitals. In Luis Bunuel's and Salvador Dali's 1928 film *Un Chien andalou*, a woman's auxillary hair grows in place of man's disappearing mouth. . .Hans Bellmer. . .often shows the congruency between the orifices of eye, ear, and mouth and vagina and anus."

One must also remember Margitte's famous 1934 painting called *The Rape* which literally equates the mouth with the vagina.

U. Schneede, *Rene Magritte. Life and Work*, tr. W. Jaffe (London: Barron's, 1978), p. 68

[22] Ibid., p. 95.

In Kantian terms, she rejects the possibility of non-conceptual grasping of being as belonging to the sphere of *pulchritudo vaga* and sees it rather in terms of the accessory beauty of *pulchritudo adhearens* for which one must necessarily have the notion of the "concept" and "purpose" ("Free beauty does not presuppose a concept of what the object is meant to be. Accessory beauty does presuppose such a concept. . .and as such is attributed to objects that fall under the concept of a particular purpose"[23]). Her failure to understand being in terms of "free beauty" is signalled earlier in a conversation with the Lilly who does not specify the purpose of its existence otherwise than in the categories of the anticipated splendour and shining of being ("Thou shalt be clothed in light", Pl.1;22) and is corrected by Thel who provides for the Lilly a list of most immediate purposes ("Thy breath doth nourish a little lamb", "Thy wine doth purify the golden honey", Pl.2:5,8).

That the voice of the "hollow pit" is answered only by a "shriek" can be, in fact, taken as a promising sign, i.e. a response which through its inarticulacy recognizes the power of the non-rational and thus allows for Thel's return to the ethics of the pastoral to be a return with a difference: it is not a withdrawal to the same list of problems, not a relapse into melancholia, but a retrieval of a previous mode of being on a different level upon which the inarticulate will now counter the repressive forces of the purpose-oriented discourse. It is this process of returning to the same with a difference which makes it possible to look at Thel's evolution as a case of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence: Thel has problems with imagining life according to the edifying messages of her instructors (which try to impose upon her a sense of general purpose and destination consummated in and by the act of final redemption) and instead is willing to repeat a horrifying experience of questioning ("The most intense effort of will that Nietzsche himself usually called for. . .was not the will to live alone or publish unpopular books, but to imagine eternal recurrence and love the truth of his fate. . ."[24]).

That Thel's exclamatory shriek is a sign of a major breakthrough can also be argued on another ground: it announces an opening of her being so far sealed off either in the discourse of inquiry or in silence. It is not incidental that in the last episode Thel remains a speechless wanderer ("She stood in silence", Pl.6;8); the paralysis of speech is a continuation and a result of the failure of her previous interrogations. Thus, an outburst, "a shriek", is an unsealing of mouth in a new discourse which belongs neither to articulacy of logic nor to the chaos of silence; if the disapperance or gluing of mouth stands for impotence, then Thel's shriek could be a violent parting of lips, an opening of mouth (but also of a vagina) which gives birth to a form which inscribes her within the domain of fertility but, at the same time, shows that its product is monstrous, deformed, "untrue" (if measured by the standards of the articulacy of discourse or conventional, "pastoral" schemes

[23] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr.W. Pluhar (Minneapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 76.

[24] H. Birenbaum, *Between Blake and Nietzsche. The Reality of Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992), p. 101.

of human beauty). "A shriek" is an act of gargantuan and outrageous birth; a shriek is a monster of Thel's previous discourses in the same way as a monster is a distortion of Dr. Frankenstein's genuine, though unrestrained, pursuit of knowledge. Without subscribing to the overtly militant feminist reading of *The Book of Thel* produced by Helen Bruder one ought, however, to endorse her claim that "the final shriek is one violent denunciation and Thel flees back to Har to reanimate her dissenting 'sighs' and 'moans' which the patriarchally saturated Clod had momentarily called down".[25] A rebellion against patriarchy (and its victory suggested by the engraving) is due to the awareness of stimuli, the arousal and exctiment which refuses to be contained by the articulate discourse. Recognizing desire (for which Thel needs death and suffering) and thus overcoming the melancholia (a "shriek" as opposed to "sighs" and "moans"), Blake's protagonist locates herself in what Nietzsche calles the "aesthetic state" and her trip through "the lands of clouds" (Pl.6;6) is also a journey to the origin of language at the spring of passion, suffering, and body ("This is where languages originate: the languages of tone as well as the languages of gestures and glances. . . even today one still hears with one's muscles, one even reads with one's muscles"; "Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common"[26]).

The "shriek" does not eliminate speech but *certainly punctures it and perforates its smooth surface uncovering the domain of purposiveness subversive towards articulate concepts of language.Thel embodies human inability to confront existence as principally non-causative in character; her return to the practices of the pastoral is a sign of the difficulty of conceiving of being as not explainable in the categories of "because".*

15.

A sense of touch, omitted from the main list of interrogations, returns (as the repressed always does in Freud's theory) in the final questions which we have already approached in section 10 and which directly precede Thel's escape. What is at stake in these two lines is a confrontation with sexuality (Harold Bloom notes with regard the final list of questions that "the vocabulary of this lament is drawn from Elizabethan conventions of erotic poetry"[27], a complicated engagement with, as we already know, most important consequences (a failure of the ethics of the sublime accompanied by a partial withdrawal towards the ethics of the pastoral). Philosophically, sexuality is presented as profoundly entrenched in violence

[25] H. Bruder,"The Sins of the Fathers", in *Historicizing Blake*, eds. S. Clark, D. Worrall (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 156.

[26] F. Nietzsche, tr. W. Kaufmann, R. Hollingdale (New York: Random House 1967), *The Will to Power*, # 809, # 810.

[27] H. Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse. A Study in Poetic Argument* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 61.

(the adjective "tender" does not invalidate the disciplinary character of the "curb" but points at the sublimation of the regimens of restraints) and in the regressive operations of desire which stimulates and, at the same time, evades and defies the body's efforts directed at fulfilment. Restrictive activities are not of a merely conventional type; rather, the problem goes deeper and presents them ("tender curb") as a necessary element of the sexual which, despite being the most radical opening unto the other, is presented already penetrated by the violent character of being. That the "curb" is "tender" emphasizes a desperate amorous effort of masking the violence by the involved parties who, attempting satisfaction, cover up the nakedness of vehemence with the intricate play of the bodies already, despite their efforts, implicated in the very violence of being. "The bed of desire" is concealed behind "a little curtain of flesh".

Desire is, for Blake, a key mechanism of man's ontological structure, but this is precisely why it is so dramatically misunderstood. Its operations are considered to lead to the utmost fulfilment and therefore desire has, over centuries, acquired a characteristic script which allows for its unequivocal readability (from the sentimental signals of tears and blushing to the pornographic ostentation of erection), whereas, for Blake, desire uses these semiotic instruments not to reveal but, just the opposite, to conceal itself. The drama of man's desire is of a radical character: we know it to be the guarantor of sanity and health on condition of prompt and unhindered operation (in Proverbs of Hell we read: "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence"), we know that it is the ultimate point of openness unto the other ("My bosom of itself is cold"), and yet it is also the realm where we realize that

Nobody analysed this ambiguity of the body better than Rene Magritte. The problem is complicated but, for our purposes it suffices to look at it from the perspective of the body which denies its own stability and fixedness: a metamorphosing body of Magritte. Putting aside the cases of metamorphosing objects (like a rock transforming into an eagle in *The Domain of Arnheim*, 1962), let us comment briefly only on the work in which it is the human body that forms the center of the metamorphic process. In 1934 Magritte paints his *Homage to Mack Sennet* with its motif of the sleeping gown which takes over the feature of the female nakedness, the motif made famous 13 years later by another of his paintings *Philosophy of Boudoir* upon which it is amplified by an image of female feet caught in the moment of transmogrification into a pair of shoes. A mystery of the body is outlined in the work in at least three ways: first, by its placement in a wardrobe which suggests closure and darkness, second, by its immobilization on a coat hanger which locks it in a somewhat uneasy relationship with the notion of the body as an animated matter, third, by the ambiguity of the direction and stage of the process of transformation – we do not know whether it is the body that is metamorphosing (or has metamorphosed) in a night gown or vice versa. Besides, the very interior of a dark wardrobe, symbolic of the womb, remains in a synecdotal relationship with the body bringing us in the immediate vicinity of the process of a monstrous birth: a body produces (and we learn about it only due the brutal opening of a door, the opening which, most probably with a squeak, with "a shriek", forms an orifice letting our gaze in) a being, a body, another body, which covers its nakedness by its nakedness, and – paradoxically – reveals the nakedness by the concealment. "The covering up of sexual features is thus revealed as a technique of exposure." The body cannot be naked, there is no way of getting round the difference which separates desire and its "bed" from "a little curtain of flesh".

U. Schneede, *Rene Magritte. Life and Work*, tr. W. Jaffe (London: Barron's, 1978), p. 70.

our body (supposedly a most perfect instrument of desire) must fail in its attempts to answer the call of desire. This failure is not trivially due to the limitations of physical strength and stamina (voiced so well by Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*); the delinquency is of a much more fundamental type and is linked directly to the character of desire which uses its physiological machinery (the body) to secure its own enigma: the body acts out desire but does not reveal it, does not show what its essence and truth is. The mystery of desire is that it belongs to the body and, at the same time, goes beyond it: the body is a passionate machine, but it also masks desire and thus veils both itself and desire (George suggests that the "little curtain of flesh" is the hymen, "the final and decisive boundary for Thel"[28], a point supported from yet another perspective by Godard who, invoking another of Blake's female characters, claims that "Rank might well appreciate the torn hymen as a symbol of the terror of separation following Birth Trauma, an emblem of Experience best worn in the manner of Oothoon – first naively, then with boldness".[29] If we read the "bed" in Blake's "bed of our desire" as an ultimate grounding, a final point beyond which one cannot go, a stratum which is impenetrable and thus in its mystery can serve as a foundation (in the same way as we do when we speak about a "river bed" or a "bedrock"), then we would be able to see that desire must remain an ever secretive layer of being, a foundation which cannot be revealed but whose operations we enact every minute through and in the activities of our body.

Thel escapes from the truth of sexuality which points, first, at its violent character moderated by sublimatory mechanisms of the amorous behaviour (which is by no means reducible to a mere conventionality but which results from our most intimate and radical effort to practice the sublime ethics of opening unto the other), and, second, at the abyssmal nature of sexuality which draws us to the bottom ("b e d", "w h i r l p o o l fierce") of being (the moment of the sublime ethics of openness) only to push us back to the surface of the self while both actions are made

Virginity of Thel which is a mark of closure and the "failure to embrace experience" and therefore of distortion of the ethical potential ("Deform'd I see these lineaments of ungratified desire", *K*, 298; "Abstinence sows sand all over/ The ruddy limbs and flaming hair,/ But Desire Gratified/ Plants fruits of life & beauty there", *K*, 178) of the openness unto the other. But it certainly reinforces Blake's attack upon the establishment and restrictiveness of political and intellectual strategies of confinement ("the mind-forg'd manacles" of London, *K*, 216; "When Satan first the black bow bent/ And the Moral Law from the Gospel rent,/ He forg'd the law into a Sword...", *K*, 683). Virginity, for Blake, is the same vehicle of political manipulation as celibacy in Hume's analysis of the policies of Rome: "The Roman pontiff, who was making every day great advances towards an absolute sovereignity over the ecclesiastics, perceived, that the celibacy of the clergy alone could break off entirely their connection with the civil power, and depriving them of every of every other object of ambition, engage them to promote...the grandeur of their own order...Celibacy, therefore, began to be extolled, as the indispensible duty of priests."

D. Hume, *History of England*, Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Libert Classics, 1983), p. 91.

[28] D. H. George, *Blake and Freud*, p. 97.

[29] J. Godard, *Mental Forms*..., p. 126.

possible through the operations of the body (one can reflect on how this situation resembles Foucault's description of the development of modern sexuality towards two processes: ". . .we demand that sex speaks the truth. . .and we demand that it tells us our truth"[30]; Blake's correction of Foucault's statement would be that indeed desire evokes truth, but its "untruth" is a part of the fundamental truth of desire). Desire activates the body and distances itself from it; a renunciation of the body, blindness to its energies and a total subjection to the elaborate protocols of its erotic practices produce the same result – an inarticulate cry, a moan, or a sigh ("a shriek") in which, in an unknown discourse defying the rationality and abstractions of Cartesianism, we express both the fascination and disappointment with desire which does not merely reveal the truth but masks it while revealing ("Sexuality, the lust to rule, pleasure in appearance and deception, great and joyful gratitude for life and its typical states. . ."; see also Nietzsche's criticism of virginity charged with Thel-like existential "anemia": "priestly = virginal = ignorant, physiological characteristics of idealists of this sort-: the anemic ideal"[31]).

Again the inarticulate sound is what must bother us here; through this collapse of the ordered discourse (partly already suggested by the insistence on the question as a main rhetorical strategy of the poem which at the end assumes a form of questions bereft of answers as if it were a parody of catechism) we try to stop, at least for a moment, to name, to relate, to form concatenations of causes and effects, in fine – to regulate the world. In an act of violence to language (inarticulacy perforates a smooth skin of discourse), we violently restrain the right of speech to do violence to things (Foucault: ". . .discourse does not passively reflect a pre-existent reality but is a violence which we do to things"[32].

Thel escapes ("with a shriek") *because she cannot face a revelation of the unfoundedness of being: in the same way as the ground opens underneath her feet* (the voice speaks from "the hollow pit"), *the structure of her existence and ontological modality is shown as relying on the foundation* ("bed of desire") *which must for ever remain covered by the very mechanism and operations* ("a little curtain of flesh") *which it has produced in order to signal and enact its presence. Nakedness conceals, but in this concealment it speaks of a nakedess beyond the nakedness of the body which only a body can painfully relate to.*

The body is both a true and false key to desire.

[30] M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, tr. B. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 69.
[31] F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, # 1047, # 341.
[32] In L. McNay, *Foucault. A Critical Introduction* (London: Polity Press, 1994), p. 96.

Fig. 2. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Grape Gatherer*, c. 1751. ©The Detroit Institute of Art, Founders Society Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Horace E. Dodge Memorial Fund

Fig. 3. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Harvester*, c. 1751. ©The Detroit Institute of Art, Founders Society Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Horace E. Dodge Memorial Fund

Fig. 4. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Wanderer*, c. 1751. ©The Detroit Institute of Art, Founders Society Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Horace E. Dodge Memorial Fund

Fig. 5. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Gardener*, c. 1751. ©The Detroit Institute of Art, Founders Society Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Horace E. Dodge Memorial Fund

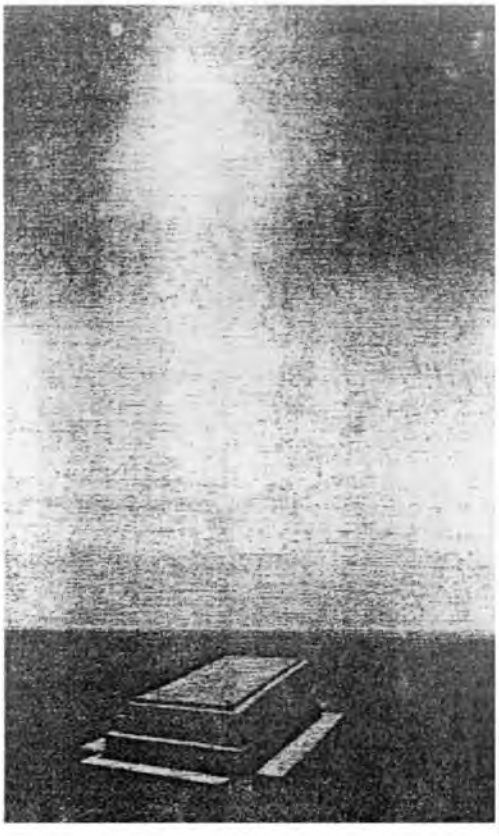

Fig. 6. *L'au-delà (The Beyond)*. 1938. Oil on canvas, $28^{3}/_{8}$ x $19^{5}/_{8}$" (72 x 50 cm). Private collection, Brussels, Belgium

Fig. 7. 38 *Homage to Mack Sennet*, 1934

Fig. 8. *La philosophie dans le boudoir (Philosophy in the Boudoir)*. 1947. Oil on canvas, $31^{7}/_{8}$ x 24" (81 x 61 cm). Private collection, Washington, D.C.

Tadeusz Sławek

„Słoneczne stadka" i „głęboka otchłań": *Księga Thel* Blake'a a kwestia seksualności

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi analizę topografii poematu *Księga Thel* Williama Blake'a w kontekście jej roli w uwolnieniu pożądania poprzez bliskość śmierci. Poprzez odejście od zieleni słonecznej łąki i decyzję eksploracji sfery śmierci Thel odchodzi od ludzkości, zarazem pozbawiając się niejako własnego głosu, który dochodzi do niej z jej grobu. Blake dokonuje w swym wierszu pewnej „korekty" tezy Foucaulta dotyczącej wymogu, aby seks mówił prawdę o nas samych. W wersji Blake'a pożądanie dotyczy prawdy, lecz fundamentalną część prawdy pożądania stanowi jego „nieprawda". Pożądanie uaktywnia ciało, zarazem dystansując się od niego; wyrzeczenie się energii ciała i poddanie się schematom praktyk erotycznych prowadzą do przemiany głosu w nieartykułowany okrzyk (*shriek*), w którym wyraża się zarówno fascynacja jak i rozczarowanie pożądaniem, które nie odsłania nam po prostu prawdy o nas, lecz odsłaniając, równocześnie ją przesłania.

Tadeusz Sławek

Les „troupeaux ensoleillés" et l' „abîme profond": *Le Livre de Thel* de Blake et la question de sexualité

Résumé

L'article se propose d'analyser la topographie du poème *Le Livre de Thel* de William Blake dans le contexte de son rôle – celui de libérer le désir sexuel à proximité de la mort. Par sa décision d'abandonner la verdure du pré ensoleillé et d'explorer la zone de la mort, Thel quitte l'humanité en se dépossédant en même temps pour ainsi dire de sa propre voix qui lui arrive de sa tombe. Dans son poème, Blake accomplit une „révision" de la thèse de Foucault selon laquelle la sexualité dit la vérité sur nous-mêmes. Dans la version de Blake, le désir concerne la vérité, mais c'est sa „non-vérité" qui constitue la part fondamentale de la vérité du desir. Celui-ci rend actif le corps tout en se distançant de lui: refuser l'énergie du corps et se subordonner aux schémas des pratiques érotiques mènent à la transformation de la voix en un cri non articulé (*shriek*) dans lequel s'exprime aussi bien la fascination que la déception du désir lesquelles ne font pas que nous dévoiler simplement la vérité sur nous, mais qui tout en la dévoilant l'occulte.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Tropes of the Erotic: Amerigo's America and the Question of (Postmodern) History

To sleep with Pocahontas
And find out how she felt
Neil Young

Oh my America, my newfound land
My kingdom, safest when with one man manned
John Donne

According to Georges Bataille, eroticism exists on the margin of history, on the margin of what he calls "history proper" which is the political and military history of the world.[1] In order for eroticism to appear in human consciousness, he claims, it is necessary that history eventually ends, that human existence becomes an ahistorical activity and thus an expression of eroticism.[2] What is thus at stake, it seems, is in fact some change of historically shaped consciousness into a consciousness in which the mode of our being is not subject to political/military (hence historical) categorization of events, but a peaceful "relaxation" from the convolutions of the clamorous world at constant war.

The title of Bataille's essay, *L'Histoire de l'érotisme*, is thus a misleading one, and it tells us, perhaps, that the text we read is an attempt at presenting the marginal, the without history, as a history of repression by history, and thus as a history of the production of ourselves as "captive men" whose power is seen as unquestionable regardless of their/our obvious bankruptcy.[3] Historical man is forgetful of eroticism broadly understood by Bataille as desire of otherness which historicity as it were erases by imposing artificial limits beyond which humanity ends. The end of history envisioned by Bataille is thus also the end of man conceived of as

[1] Georges Bataille, *Historia erotyzmu*, tr. Ireneusz Kania (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992), p. 161.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

a historical being, the end procured not so much by focusing on the marginal, as by a withdrawal of the centre, which thus produces what Bataille calls "the sovereignty of the erotic". This sovereignty is not understood as any kind of domination, however, but as an absolute autonomy which, literally, does not serve anything. It is, in Bataille, the notion of "serving" which is responsible for the through and through utilitarian system in which everything serves something else, and where nothing is sovereign. With the end of history, it will be impossible to mistake the sovereign position of eroticism with its potential usefulness.[4] Eroticism made useful, purposeful, is sexuality, another domain of historicity whose workings Bataille finds also in psychoanalysis. Eroticism as such, on the other hand, cannot become a subject of any disciplinary gaze which always banishes it to the sphere of shameful silence unbecoming to man and thus depriving him of the possibility of autonomous existence. What is at stake in eroticism, Bataille claims, is "something sovereign which cannot serve anything".[5]

The end of historical man in Bataille is not, as it might seem, a prognostic of a return to nature pure and simple, to animalism in which sexual desire is satisfied in an unrestricted manner. Imposition of certain restrictions upon sexual behaviour is part and parcel of human condition. These restrictions, however, as taboos, as long as they remain within the sphere of visibility, constitute a part of human experience as a possibility of transgression. It is the denial of the existence of this sphere, its repression, that enslaves man to "another world", or realm, in which humanity is redrawn as a one-dimensional, rigorous constitution.

What distinguishes prohibition from repression, as Foucault phrases it, is that the latter operates

> as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know.[6]

Bataille's apology of eroticism, as he admits, is, in fact, an apology for humanity whose strength consists in the possibility of its coexistence with what seems to be its denial. Humanity, as he somehow pathetically claims at the end of the *Introduction*, will cease to exist on the day it stops being what it is – a tangle of violent contrasts.[7] Bataille's eroticism, as it should now be more or less obvious, is not a category limited to sexual behaviour. The "tangle of violent contrasts" with which, or in which, humanity is bound to exist is a realm of which otherness, however violently, partakes and which it also constitutes by way of simultaneously undermining it. Bataille's erotic is thus a non-category of sorts whose liberating strength enlivens the "captive man", without, however, offering him a total, boundless liberty, without a dissolution into otherness, into the wild, or the dead

[4] Ibid., p. 10.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (Penguin Books, 1981), p. 4.

[7] Cf. Georges Bataille, *Historia. . .*, p. 12.

(Bataille also sees death as a fearful sphere of the erotic which is also the sphere of discursive prohibition).[8] Hence the impossibility of constructing the erotic in Bataille, implicit in his postulate of the ahistoricity of the erotic, of the fallacy of defining it as a category separate from that of living. Rephrasing Heidegger, we might say that "erotically man dwells", that one's being is always being erotic. In yet other words we might say that we are always facing our own otherness which, unlike the unconscious, is not governed by any rules or principles available at least to a psychoanalytically trained eye, but whose very existence is motivated by the potentiality of transgression which does not serve, as we have seen, any purpose, which has no teleology or history, but which offers us a sovereignty, a trace of autonomy without entirely subjecting us to our own subjectivity.

Putting it bluntly, Bataille's eroticism is the sphere which evades what is traditionally, or historically, recognized as the erotic, say, the sphere of sexual attractiveness which awakens desire. Bataille's "erotic" is as it were transsexual, a liberating (if not revolutionary) force which also promises a political liberation from history. Hence also the necessity of a dehumanization of humanity, a postulate whose negativity is denied by Lyotard in his *The Inhuman* as different from annihilation:

> Dehumanized still implies human – a dead human, but conceivable: because dead in human terms, still capable of being sublated in thought.[9]

Postmodernity posits its "inhumanity" as something still conceivable in the context of what it denies. Lyotard's hypothesis concerning putting the unpresentable in presentation itself as a mode of "understanding" the postmodern seems to have much in common with Bataille's attempt at "deerotization" of the erotic and translating it into a conceivable, though not quite presentable (by history, for instance), sphere where sexual differences of men and women seem to be not so much irrelevant, as already overcome. What seems to characterize the discourse of the postmodern is the programmatic avoidance of constructing something which might be suspected of a presentation of something presentable. "The unpresentable", "the inhuman" or "the erotic" are in fact equivalent terms which, like indexes, point at something desirable simultaneously stopping short of presenting what is being pointed at and thus disabling a possibility of satisfying the desire.

As, generally, a critique of "the proper", the discourse of the postmodern, as it were by definition, refuses any kind of satisfaction by way of possession or accomplishment. What it only allows for is some sort of penetration of the Other without a promise of any finality. If for Freud, for instance, the approach of otherness, once recognized, necessitates recognition and symbolization,[10] postmodernity leaves it unrecognized and unexplored without really giving it a name or

[8] Cf. ibid., p. 66.

[9] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 10.

[10] Cf. Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets", tr. J. Strachey, in Dan Latimer (ed.), *Contemporary Critical Theory* (San Diego . . . Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), pp. 489–499.

a shape and only ostensively, perhaps pointlessly, pointing (where "to point", like Barthes' "to write" is an intransitive verb). Postmodernism, in other words, refuses to choose by way of positing the Other as inevitably there, and only made inaccessible, inhabitable by man, by the metaphysics of presence whose power to name and thus to make present, which the postmodern attempts to overcome.

Writing about the figuration of death as woman in "The Theme of the Three Caskets" Freud posits choice against necessity in a clearly erotic context:

> Choice stands in the place of necessity, of destiny. In this way man overcomes death, which he has recognized intellectually. No greater triumph of wish fulfillment is conceivable. A choice is made where in reality there is obedience to a compulsion; and what is chosen is not a figure of terror, but the fairest and most desirable of women. [11]

Such a translation of death into an erotic figure is, from the postmodern perspective, an example of appropriation and domestication by discourse which actually deprives death of otherness by rendering it as an object of selection and desire. The replacement of choice for necessity, which Freud reads as a compulsion of sorts, deprives the vision of death of what Bataille calls horror and decay.[12] It also creates a vision of eroticism deprived of terror and thus desublimates the erotic and posits it as a sphere of some purely aesthetic possession. Perhaps it is this mechanism of "eroticization" of the Other in the Freudian sense that is responsible for the very possibility of the postmodern which sees in it, rightly or wrongly, a mechanism of repression which, in postmodernism's feminist versions, is the phallogocentric imposition of masculine order upon otherwise, say, androgenous world.

This question of "eroticization" of otherness and of its repressive character also seems to be an important issue in any discussion of the world both temporally and topographically distant from where Bataille's, say, postmodernist voice comes from. The "discovery" (and, for a number of reasons, this word should remain in quotation marks) of what is now called America is an event (perhaps historical, but it is the very idea of a "discovery" of a populated territory which poses a serious metahistorical problem) in which the erotic, intrinsically embedded within the question of the other, plays a crucial role. Christened with Vespucci's feminized first name, America, perhaps like Freud's death, is a figure of a woman inviting penetration and domestication.

In Stradanus's (Jan van der Straet's) engraving of "America" the continent is discovered by Europe personified in the figure of Vespucci. America is presented there as a naked woman rising from a hammock and inviting Amerigo to come closer. Though "invitingly erotic", as Peter Hulme notices, America first of all invites its name, a mark of identification which will endow it with a substantiality which otherwise would remain undiscovered:

[11] Ibid., pp. 497–498.

[12] Georges Bataille, *Historia*. . ., p. 70.

> So Vespucci discovers America. America lies there, very definitely dis-covered. And from Vespucci's mouth comes the letters of the word AMERICA, as he recognizes or names this naked woman, speaks *her* name, which is *his* name feminized.[13]

What seems to be paradoxical in this representation of America is that in order to become an erotic object of desire, the continent must be both "undressed" and simultaneously named and thus as it were gendered as a woman. It is the very gesture of representing America as a woman that involves some kind of translation into familiar terms. By endowing this woman with his own name, Vespucci in fact performs a marriage ceremony. As a wife to Mr. Vespucci, America can now be reconstructed as an already European territory whose eroticism can now be held within the limits of this paradoxical marital bond in which whatever there was before the discovery had, say, no say. If, as Peter Hulme suggests, "European civility – can only guarantee the stability of its own foundations by denying the substantiality of other worlds and other words"[14], it can do so only by projecting this stability upon what it finds insubstantial. The "other worlds and other words" are thus rendered insubstantial exactly by way of naming them as such, as worlds and words which, though perhaps distant and "other", are already familiar. What thus takes place is the reduction of otherness (in which Bataille found a sphere of the erotic), a repression which renders the other as unattractive, chaotic, and actually nonexistent.

Stradanus's body of America is also, quite evidently, a projection of an Indian woman. Yet her femininity is, as I have already noticed, constructed by rendering her as already domestic and named. What is thus achieved is the legitimization of sexual possession by marriage which also rhetorically legitimizes the possession of land along with its inhabitants. What might be seen as a rape, is now seen as a socially acceptable cohabitation in which desire is both restrained and controlled from within. This figuration of America as a married woman is also a projection of some generalized femininity upon the non-European, upon men and women as well as upon the land itself. "Safest when with one man manned" (see the epigram above), a woman without a man is unsafe, she is an other which, at least according to an author known only by his initials T.E., does not quite exist by herself:

> In this consolidation which we call wedlock is a locking together. It is true, that man and wife are one person; but understand in what manner. When a small brooke or a little river incorprateth with the Rhodanus, Humber or Thames, the poor rivulet looseth her name; it is carried and recarried with the new associate; it bareth no sway; it possesseth nothing coveture. A woman as soon as she is married, is called *covert*; in Latin *nupta*, that is "veiled"; as it were clouded or over-shadowed; she hath lost her streame . . . Her new self is her superior; her companion, her master . . . All women are understood either married, or to be married, and their desires are to their husbands.[15]

[13] Peter Hulme, "Polytropic Man: Tropes of Sexuality and Mobility in Early Colonial Discourse", in F. Barker et al. (ed.), *Europe and its Others. Essex Sociology of Literature Conference*, Vol. 2 (Essex, 1984), p. 17.

[14] Ibid., p. 25.

[15] T. E., *The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights* (London, 1632). Quoted in S. Findley, E. Hobby, "Seventeenth Century Women's Autobiography", ed. F. Barker et al., *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century. Essex Sociology of Literature Conference* (Essex, 1980), p. 13.

An unmarried woman is thus a tributary which does not flow anywhere, a creature "to no point inclined", and thus insubstantial in the organization of the world and actually a stranger to its constitution. Her destiny is to be veiled by a new name without which her old one is as irrelevant as if it was no name at all. An unmarried woman and an Indian are thus either to be potentially married or not to belong to society/humanity at all. As Helen Carr notices, in the language of colonialism both the non-Europeans and women are seen, with the same ambivalence, as part of nature rather than culture:

> . . .either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like . . . needing leadership and guidance, described always in terms of lack; or . . . they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal. . . .[16]

A legitimately possessed woman accepts the leadership and guidance of the "master" thus becoming elevated to the sphere of the culturally regulated eroticism which also defines "sexual aberration" as a prohibited sphere of uncontrolled or unrestrained sexuality, "the other" eroticism which, as Peter Mason notices, "Vespucci and his fellow voyagers found it hard to resist".[17] As Vespucci, perhaps against himself, himself reports describing Indian women:

> The women, as I have said, go about naked and seductively, but their bodies are attractive and clean enough. Nor are they as shameless [*turpis*] as one might perhaps suppose, because the fact of their being well filled out makes shamelessness less apparent, since it is covered for the most part by their excellent body structure. We were surprised to see that none of them had sagging breasts and those who had given birth did not differ at all from virgins with respect to the shape and size of their bellies. The same is true for the other parts of the body, which I shall gloss over for decency's sake. When they had the opportunity of having intercourse with Christians they were driven on by excessive lasciviousness and threw all decency to the wind.[18]

Contrary to the appearance of their bodies which Vespucci actually renders as a kind of dressing covering their shamelessness, the Indian women are lascivious and indecent within. Though erotically attractive, their lasciviousness excludes them from the sphere of a decent eroticism. As it seems, the Christians engaging in their lasciviousness are not indecent at all, and their role in the experience seems to be that of decent observers who take part in the lascivious enterprises of Indian women against their will. "The other bodily parts" which Vespucci sees and does not mention "for decency's sake" are a part of the same discursive construction of eroticism as both attractive and appalling, as human and inhuman at the same time. What the composed bodily constitution of the women produces is of course

[16] Helen Carr, "Woman/Indian: 'The American' and His Others", in F. Barker et al. (ed.), *Europe and its Others. Essex Sociology of Literature Conference*, Vol. 2 (Essex, 1984), p. 50.

[17] Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America. Representations of the Other* (London and New York, 1990), p. 27.

[18] Quoted in ibid., p. 171.

a promise of the future correction and improvement, of conversion to the preferably marital sexuality of the old continent.

Interestingly, what Vespucci's gaze sees in Stradanus's engraving is also the illustration of what Vespucci decently leaves almost unmentioned in the above quotation. "The other bodily parts" of the Indian woman, just as in Vespucci's story, are invisible to the viewer, and the only person who can somehow experience them is the brave Christian voyager. Vespucci (in the engraving) "experiences" America with a banner in hand, fully dressed, with an armour, and with a sword partly visible at his side. The Indian woman, like the American continent, seems to be an already familiar and domestic creature who awaits and invites this peculiar penetration. Yet the compass in Vespucci's left hand opens up a certain uncertainty, a fear of losing the sense of direction within the unmapped, though already named with his own name, territory. Lest the Indian lasciviousness, loss of control over the erotic behaviour, become, say, too attractive a discovery for others, the discoverer hides what he sees from the discourse which is supposed to reveal the American reality. What is left unspoken or unseen is simultaneously rendered as undesirable, as perversion or monstrosity of sorts. Hence, as Peter Mason notices, "Vespucci's famous account of the inhuman cruelty of the women who enlarge the sexual organs of their males by applying venomous insects to them, sometimes leading to castration".[19] Sexually overactive, Indian women threaten with a loss, which is also translatable into economic terms as wastefulness.[20] What is thus justified and legitimized is the appropriation of America along with its people via implantation of the idea of property upon otherwise generally improper territory of the Other. Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, for instance, quite literally uses the argument of the lack of the idea of private property in Indians in order to support his classification of them as *servi natura*, as natural slaves, the notion which he borrows from Aristotle. Indians, he declares, are as inferior

> as children are to adults, as women are to men. Indians are as different from Spaniards as cruel people are from mild people. . . .Compare then those blessings enjoyed by Spaniards of prudence, genius, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and religion with those *homunculi* in whom you will scarcely find even vestiges of humanity, who not only possess no science but who also lack letters and preserve no documents of their history except certain vague and obscure reminiscences of some things in certain paintings. Neither do they have written laws, but barbaric institutions and customs. They do not even have private property.[21]

Mild Spanish *conquistadores* are thus to endow Indians with humanity which they are short of and whose main exponents are private property, institutions, and, quite significantly, history. What is also inscribed in Sepúlveda's text is skepticism as

[19] Cf. ibid., p. 172.

[20] Cf. ibid.

[21] Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, *Demócrates segundo o de las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios* (Madrid, 1951). Quoted in Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians. As Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 47.

to the possibility of conversion rendered as a lack of the properly human features in the very bodily constitution of Indians. Indians are *homunculi*, small people whose enlargement is quite unthinkable. Although Sepúlveda constructed his theory of Indian character without ever having visited America, his *Demócrates segundo* (though opposed in the 1550s by more tolerant thinkers like Bartolomeo de Las Casas), regardless of the fictional basis of his theory, actually legitimizes the conquest which, in his view, is actually an act of justice, a just punishment for Indian sins and obscenities. "How can we doubt", he asks, "that these people, so uncivilized, so barbaric, so contaminated with so many sins and obscenities. . .have been justly conquered by such an excellent, and most just king as was Ferdinand the Catholoic and is now Emperor Charles, and by such a humane nation which is excellent in every kind of virtue".[22]

Naturally small, Sepúlveda's Indians are also naturally, contaminated from within with some innate sins and obscenities. This contamination, as an extension of the projection of lasciviousness of Indian women (and of women in general) upon the whole people, endows attractiveness with threat in colonial discourse. If, as we have seen, the attraction comes from the perfect beauty of bodies, a projection of virginity and willful submission which promises a "married" co-existence and penetration, the simultaneous threat originates in the possibility of the existence of some Indian autonomy and hence of independent human subjects in Indians. Such an autonomy, as an only superficially attractive autonomy without properties (proper ethical codes, but also private property and hence the privacy of the subject), if once allowed to be active, became a threat of destruction, both physical and epistemological, of the European subjects and subjectivity. This alternative autonomy, perhaps reminiscent of Bataille's autonomy of the erotic discussed in the beginning of this paper, becomes the subject of discursive repression exactly as the fearful sphere of the other whose very presence, however distant, threatens with the possibility of loss.

The lurking fear (to use the title of H. P. Lovecraft's story a little out of context) of loss, is also the fear of getting lost (Vespucci's compass), of losing one's identity whose stability can only be granted by restraint whose lack is rhetorically projected upon the eroticized body of the continent. The lack of sexual restraint in Indian women, their sexual wastefulness, is also projected upon all Indians as an ethical deficiency *in extremis* which is, of course, cannibalism. To the threat of being raped by Indian women who nothing but look for an opportunity of having "intercourse with Christians" there is thus added the threat of being eaten which is also present in the background of Stradanus's engraving in the form of a human leg roasted in a bonfire. What is thus articulated, though in the background, is the "Spaniards' greatest fear [which was] that they would be assimilated, literally absorbed, by being eaten" and thus find a tomb in an Indian belly – a fear quite literally expressed by Bernal Díaz in his *Conquest of New Spain*.[23]

[22] Ibid., p. 47.

[23] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions. The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 136.

The foreground of Stradanus's engraving seems to be bridging the distance between Europe and (its) Other by indicating the possibility of a marital link or relationship with its promise of safe "entering the space of the alien", as Stephen Greenblatt phrases it in his brilliant discussion of Dìaz's fascination with destruction of Aztec cities. The seemingly marginal presence of the cannibal feast in the background, on the other hand, erects an obstacle which makes the possibility of "an acceptance of the other in self and the self in other"[24] actually unthinkable. The erotization of America serves only the purpose of its identification, of naming it as an object whose autonomy is, by the same gesture, denied. Indians become, via the initial identification, again "one with the forests and beasts" and thus actually vanish as human beings.[25] Later, in the Protestant version of the conquest, "The vanishing Indian was a dream born of desire. [The dream of]. . .the American Adam, who creates himself autochtonically and, instead of Eve, mates with a Virgin land."[26]

Though the Spanish conquest of America did not insist so strongly on the production of the new, self-reliant individual, what is at stake in it is also a construction of a "virgin land, which, according to Greenblatt, is achieved by way of "complete estrangement" of the Other.[27] Following the initial (the foreground of Stradanus's engraving) identification as the erotic, the Other is then estranged as alien and threatening (the background of Stradanus's engraving) thus justifying its possession not exactly as an object but as something which, as the other, does not have any properties of an object. In other words, what is opened up is a paradoxical sphere of desire to possess without an accomplishment in possession, a desire which can be satisfied only when its paradoxical object (which is not quite an object) disappears. Since, perhaps, the only way to possess and not

[24] Ibid., p. 135.

[25] Helen Carr, *"Woman/Indian. . .",* p. 53.

[26] Ibid. The dream of autochtonic self-creation can also be found in texts which seemingly have little to do with colonial discourse. Satires on women, a genre flourishing in England in the second part of the seventeenth century, generally ridiculed women for inconstancy, both sexual and, say, constitutional. Robert Gould, for instance, claims that:

> No more the Wind, the faithless Wind shall be
> A *Simile* for their Inconstancy,
> For that sometimes is fixt; but Woman's mind,
> Is never to one Point inclin'd.

Robert Gould, "Love Given O're" (1682), in *Satires on Women* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1976), p. 8. Hence the dream of finding an unpopulated land where one could establish a constant society with some more constant companions verbalized by Richard Ames in "The Folly of Love" (1691):

> Oh! were there but some *Island* vast and wide,
> Where *Nature's Drest* in all her choisest *Pride*; . . .
> Producing all things which we useful call,
> As *Edens-Garden* did before the *Fall*, . . .
> There with a Score of *Choice Selected Friends*, . . .
> We'd Live, and could we Procreate like Trees,
> And Without *Womans Aid* –
> Promote and Propagate our *Species*.

Satires on Women, p. 26.

[27] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous. . .*, p. 135.

to possess, to possess and to simultaneously destroy is to eat, to consume, Greenblatt, quite rightly, I think, summarizes the sixteenth-century Spanish enterprise (using the figure of cannibalism) as one which

> is fanatically dedicated to swallowing the whole vast land mass and all of its peoples. Theirs was the greatest experiment in political, economic, and cultural cannibalism in the history of the Western world.[28]

Perhaps it is not just word play that in order to consummate, to complete and make perfect, one first has to consume, to devour, eat or destroy. There is no history without a destruction: "history, cannibalistic and necrophagous, constantly calls for new victims, for new events, so as to be done with them a little bit more", writes Baudrillard writing on the illusion of the end of history.[29] In Bataille, history was the limit of the erotic, a construction and consummation of the present constitutive of the absence of autonomy. What makes Bataille's reading of the erotic relevant for an analysis of colonialism is, exactly, this absence, and actually depravation, of autonomy by way of erotizing the spheres which, seemingly, have nothing to do with eroticism.

The erotization of America discussed above is but an example of this construction whose result is, perhaps inevitably, a banishment to pre-history, a consumption of the transgressive by a narrative, banishment into the stomach of historical narration for which a beginning is necessary. It is not by coincidence then, that the autonomy of America, of any conquered territory, must begin with a date, be it a date of discovery, of a battle, of a declaration. Eroticization is, in a way historicization, a rhetorical subjection to the possibility of being possessed. History feeds upon the (erotic) desire which it simultaneously denies and excludes as limitless and lascivious, and hence anti-historical because impossible to be accomplished within its "ethics of finality", a phrase which, epitomizes the presence of the erotic within Western epistemology in its teleological figuration of truth as a desirable woman, preferably naked, though possible to be fully possessed. Perhaps it is the very idea of accomplishment, of finality, of full possession that Bataille's eroticism questions and posits as repressive of the autonomous eroticism, as a limit which is also its own the end.

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* *

In the Capitol in Washington one picture from among the series illustrating the beginnings (or pre-history, as Peter Hulme has it[30]) of the United States, the state of Virginia is represented by Pocahontas, an Indian woman who in 1607, when she was twelve years old, supposedly saved John Smith's (one of Virginia's leaders who was captured by Pamunkey Indians)) life throwing herself over his body

[28] Ibid., p. 136.
[29] Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, tr. Chris Turner (Polity Press, 1994), p. 22.
[30] Cf. Peter Hulme, "Polytropic Man...", p. 27.

Fig. 1. Source Th. Galle, after "America" by J. Stradanus

just before he was to be executed. Then she was kidnapped by the colonists, baptized and given the name of Rebecca (Pocahontas meant "Little Wanton"[31]), and then married a colonist of the name John Rolfe with whom she visited England in 1616. She died on board a ship which was to take her back to Virginia in 1646. The Capitol picture shows the scene of her baptism, the moment when "Little Wanton" becomes Rebecca. She also had a clan name, the first one – Mataoka – whose meaning history does not record.

[31] Cf. ibid., p. 26.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Tropy erotyczne: Ameryka Amerigo Vespucciego a kwestia (ponowoczesnej) historii

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę analizy erotyzacji Ameryki jako kobiety w dyskursie kolonialnym w kontekście postmodernistycznego odczytania kwestii erotyki przez Bataille'a w *Historii erotyzmu* jako pozahistorycznej sfery represji. W dyskursie kolonialnym owa represja dokonuje się poprzez nadanie uporządkowania topograficznego, w którym nie ma miejsca na autonomię, nawet na nazwy własne miejsc geograficznych. „Ameryka", jako rodzaj żeński imienia „Amerigo", stanowi dyskursywną wersję kobiety europejskiej, obiecując dokonującym jej podboju uległość i chęć wejścia w związek, którego retoryka jest retoryką związku matrymonialnego.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Les Tropes érotiques: L'Amérique d'Amerigo Vespucci et la question d'histoire (postmoderniste)

Résumé

L'article analyse le processus d'érotisation de l'Amérique traitée comme une femme dans le discours colonial dans le contexte de la lecture postmoderniste de la question d'érotique considérée par Georges Bataille (*Histoire de l'érotisme*) comme une sphère de répression extrahistorique. Dans le discours colonial, cette répression trouve son expression par la mise en ordre topographique d'où est exclue l'autonomie et même les noms propres de lieux géographiques. „L'Amérique" étant la version féminine du prénom „Amerigo", constitue une figuration discursive de la femme européenne en promettant à ceux qui partent à la conquête la soumission et le désir de former une union dont la rhétorique est celle d'un couple officiel (matrimonial).

Jerzy Sobieraj

Sex(d)uality: A Note on Carson McCullers' Literary Preoccupations

The popularity of gender studies has been constantly increasing in recent decades. "The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' , which the eighteenth-century biographer assumed were standard measures, have become for twentieth-century readers the first objects of critical measurement."[1] Sexuality of man, one of important, though not exclusive, aspects of gender theory, has appeared to be a favorite subject of the twentieth-century literature.

The theme emerges as significant in American fiction of the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the writings of Henry Miller, Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, and Carson McCullers, the novelists who started their careers at that period.

McCullers focusing in her fiction on human nature, identity, and psychology is particularly occupied with the sphere of sexuality. And also in her poetry she tries to express her doubts and convictions concerning the above, the traditional division into "masculine" and "feminine" and, related to this, search for identity. A fine illustration of these subjects can be found in the following lines:

> Why are we split upon our double nature, how are we planned?
> Father, upon what image are we spanned?
> . . .
> We suffer the sorrow of separation and division
> With a heart that blazes with Christ's vision:
> That though we be deviously natured, dual-planned,
> Father, upon Thy image we are spanned.[2]

Relating both human nature and likeness to God is the obvious parallel. Also the idea of sexual duality is rooted in God, creator of mankind. "So God created man

[1] Myra Jehlen, "Gender", in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 263–264.

[2] Carson McCullers, *The Mortgaged Heart* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 298.

in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."(Genesis 2, 27). It is not an unusual tendency of man to create an anthrophomorphic image of God. Traditionally, this image must be also andromorphic (Father, Lord) and, as Miguel de Unamuno emphasizes, the presence of the feminine element makes the creator the ideal picture of man.[3]

"Double vision", "Nothing resembles nothing", "Man's transfigured vision" are only a few phrases from McCullers' poetry dealing with duality of man and diversity of human nature. "Stone Is Not Stone" is the poem in which McCullers poses the question of man's identity and his uncertainty about the world which surrounds him.

> There was time when stone was stone
> And a face on the street was a finished face
> Between the Thing, myself and God alone
> There was an instant symetry.
> Since you have altered all my world this trinity is twisted:
> Stone is not stone
> And faces like the fractioned characters in dreams are incomplete
> Until in the child's inchoate face
> I recognize your exiled eyes.
> . . .[4]

One might well go to the words of the poems trying to find a suitable motto to McCullers' fiction, especially to her 1943 novelette, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*.

The Ballad is the story of a complicated relationship among three grotesque characters, Amelia, Lymon, and Marvin. Amelia Evans, who emphasizes her strong ties with her father, is introduced as having "a face like dim faces known in dreams – sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes", "She was a dark, tall woman with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cut short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her face a tense, haggard quality." She "cared nothing for the love of man and was a solitary person. Her marriage. . . was. . .strange and dangerous. . .queer", she was "dressed in overalls and gum boots."[5]

Lymon Willis who, one day, appears at the door of Amelia's house and convinces her to be her cousin, is a hunchback with "a very large head, with deep-set blue eyes and a sharp little mouth" and "lavendar shadows beneath his eyes". When Amelia took closer care of him he changed his attire and "On his skinny legs he wore black stockings. . .and a shawl of lime-green wool."[6]

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[3] Miguel de Unamuno, *O poczuciu tragiczności życia wśrod ludzi i narodów* (*Del sentimiento tragico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*), tr. Henryk Woźniakowski (Kraków, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), p. 190. See also Jerzy Sobieraj, "O interpretacji religijnej powieści Carson McCullers 'Serce to samotny myśliwy'", in Wojciech Kalaga and Tadeusz Sławek (eds.), *Interpretacje i style krytyki* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1988), pp. 31–32.

[4] Carson McCullers, *The Mortgaged. . .*, p. 299.

[5] Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* (New York: Bantham Books, 1964), pp. 3–5.

[6] Ibid., pp. 7, 18.

Marvin Macy is handsome, tall, and hard-muscled with the worst possible reputation, a man who killed somebody and degraded several young girls.

What may strike the reader is the sexual inversion or ambivalence of Amelia and Lymon. The traditional proportion between the masculine and the feminine elements is clearly disturbed here. Amelia and Lymon seem to be a perfect illustration of what, as Mary Roberts suggests, Wirginia Woolf expounds in *Orlando*:

> Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male and female likeness while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above.[7]

Amelia's cloths, looks, and behavior resemble a male character whereas Lymon is Amelia's opposite; delicate and weak, often crying, he would be a picture of a female type. The crucial difference between Amelia and Lymon seems to be, respectively, her activity and energy and his passivity, the features which in early age of both sexes might be a sign of a possibility of developing their future homosexuality.[8]

Amelia taking care of Lymon emasculates him disguising her cousin into a woman.

> Beneath this was a fresh red and black chequered shirt belonging to Miss Amelia. He did not wear trousers such as ordinary men are meant to wear, but a pair of tight fitting little knee-length breeches. On his shiny legs he wore black stockings, and his shoes were of a special kind, being queerly shaped, laced up over the ankles. . .he wore a shawl of lime-green wool, the fringes of which almost touched the floor.[9]

Masculine Amelia additionally emphasizes feminine features of Lymon thus making her love relationship with her cousin more natural and justifiable. The characters desperately search for complimentary types. Masculine Amelia accepts feminine Lymon who becomes emotionally attracted to manly Marvin, who marrying Amelia is blind enough to notice that she would never accept a dominant husband.

But no matter how complicated and ambivalent sexuality of the characters of *The Ballad* is they tend to look for true love and possible reciprocity. Those short periods during which they are involved in emotional relationships are significant as time of change, change for better.

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[7] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 103. Also quoted and discussed in Mary Roberts, "Imperfect Androgyny and Imperfect Love in the Works of Carson McCullers", *University of Hartford Studies in Literature*, Vol. XII, (1980), p. 75.

[8] For a discussion of the relationship between behavior of children and possible development of homosexual tendencies see Anne Moir's and David Jessel's, *Brain Sex. The Real Difference Between Men and Women*. I am using a Polish text translated by Nina Kancewicz-Hoffman, *Płeć mózgu* (Warszawa: PIW, 1993), p. 174.

[9] Carson McCullers, *The Ballad. . .*, p. 18. Emasculating Lymon is also discussed in Robert S. Phillips' article, "Painful Love. Carson McCullers' Parable", *Southwest Review*, Vol. LI, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), p. 81.

Though sexual duality of the characters does not annihilate the chance for real relationships, it certainly makes it difficult. "Imperfect androgyny" may result in "imperfect love", to borrow a phrase from Mary Roberts' essay[10]. The love of the lover is never reciprocated by the beloved.

Though making us aware of how unsuccessful the communication between the unstereotyped and ambivalent characters can often be Carson McCullers emphasizes the strong and desperate need for relationships, for true love, which makes all human beings equal, irrespective of their nature, looks, or preferences.

[10] Mary Roberts, *Imperfect Androgyny*..., p. 73.

Jerzy Sobieraj

Seksualne orientacje w twórczości Carson McCullers

Streszczenie

Carson McCullers, zarówno w swej twórczości prozatorskiej, jak i w utworach poetyckich, podejmuje problem kształtowania się osobowości postaci, szczególnie eksponując sferę orientacji seksualnej. Tradycyjny podział płci na żeńską i męską ulega w utworach pisarki swoistej inwersji. Zniewieściali bohaterowie i zmaskulinizowane bohaterki poszukują swego miejsca w świecie, jednakże zakłócenie proporcji pomiędzy męskim a żeńskim pierwiastkiem ich osobowości staje się przyczyną wielu problemów, prowadząc często do ostatecznego osamotnienia.

Jerzy Sobieraj

Les Orientations sexuelles dans l'oeuvre de Carson McCullers

Résumé

Aussi bien dans son oeuvre de prose que dans ses poèmes, Carson McCullers parle du problème de la formation de la personnalité de personnages en exposant particulièrement la sphère d'orientation sexuelle. La division traditionnelle en sexe féminin et masculin subit dans son oeuvre une inversion spécifique. Les héros effeminés et les héroïnes „mâles" cherchent leur place dans le monde, mais le déséquilibre entre les proportions d'éléments mâle et féminin de leurs personnalités est à l'origine de beaucoup de problèmes qui aboutissent à la solitude définitive.

Ewa Borkowska

A Flight Before Light: Some Remarks on Levinas' Phenomenology of Eros

Virtue's no more in womankind
But the green sickness of the mond
Philosphy, their new delight . . .
J. Cleveland, *The Antiplatonic*

The feminine is not what opposes the masculine but what seduces it. The secret of its strength is that it is always somewhere else, never where it thinks it is, not in the history imputed to it but in seduction. Jean Baudrillard regards the "sovereignty of seduction as mastery of symbolic universe" and not as political or sexual power.[1] Seduction, though, has no power of its own or at least it seems not to have one; it only annuls the power of production. The theatricality, rhetoricity and sterility of seduction, however, seem to stand in opposition to the fertility (fecundity) of the feminine and its clandestinity. The feminine is what throws itself into the light (appearance) without becoming signification[2], the not yet, unreality at the thresold of the real, clandestinity that "exhausts essence of this non-essence".[3]

Levinas, whose philosophy will be considered here as a phenomenological underpinning of the poetics of the feminine regards the female as an embodiment of the absolutely other. The feminine is not only one party in the fusion that binds the male and the female but an individual in the duality of beings. Thus conceived a relationship respects the alterity and preserves it despite the fact that the other remains constantly ungraspable, keeps slipping away, withdraws into its mystery. The transcendence as withdrawing and hiding as modesty are the inverse movements that characterize the phenomenology of Eros, that is a communication in eros. A "reversal of movement" lies at the bottom of a distinction between Greek and Christian love, the former always regarded as an aspiration of the lower towards

[1] Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 8.
[2] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p. 250.
[3] Ibid., p. 257.

the higher whereas the latter the reverse, the stooping of the rich and the nobler to the poor and the common. In Levinas' philosophy love is considered as the veneration of the otherness with the alterity of the other person, however, different from submission and enslavement. Levinas does not conceal the fact that in his view the model of otherness is reminiscent of the medieval chivalric code with a great respect for the female dignity which bears here a cryptic name of the "voluptuous clandestinity".

The uniqueness of the relationship with alterity lies in the fact that it is a very particular kind of voluptuous pleasure, unlike any other fusion. The caress here is a mode which allows one to transcend contact as sensation since it is not confined to the touching hand, its warmth and softness; on the contrary, its essence is that it is not aware of what it seeks. Levinas explains that the tender that caress aims at designates a way, the one between being and not-yet-being, not signifying but frail in its vulnerability and morality. The caress alway looks forward and opens up new perspectives onto the unknown and the ungraspable, its aim never grasping, possessing and knowing, the latter the synonyms and symptoms of power. J. Ruskin is not the first one to notice that men and women are assigned different modes of activity as is proclaimed in his essay *Of Queen's Gardens*; in an old-fashioned and slightly baroque manner he describes the major difference between the two powers:

> The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer. His intellect is for speculation and invention, his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest. . .But the woman's power is not for rule, not for battle – and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. . .Her great function is praise.[4]

The Ruskinian ideology of the feminine remains, though, at loggerheads with the phenomenology of Eros according to which each party remains complete and not completing each other in the union since the "pathos of love consists in an insurmountable duality of beings".[5] The status of man and woman is not, in Levinas' view, reducible to a difference in a genus but that of fraternity which has two aspects:

> it involves individualities whose. . .singularity consists in each referring to itself. . . . On the other hand, it involves the commonness of a father, as though the commonness of race would not bring together enough.[6]

According to Levinas love is posited before the fusion and therefore escapes any possibility of the pre-existing whole. The other is not another existent but alterity, alien-ation which is its essence, the withdrawing mystery that is opposed to the movement of consciousness.

The communication with the other can be neither projected nor planned since it is a game absolutely unpredictable, with something inaccessible, always to come,

[4] Lynette Need, *Myths of Sexuality* (Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 34.
[5] Sean Hand, *The Levinas Reader* (Blackwell, 1989), p. 49.
[6] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 214.

always other, the relationship with the future, with what is never there. Only such a relationship allows for the triumph and survival of the I, the situation described as the victory over death, the secret forced by the caress that does not grasp the possibles. In Levinas' words:

> An amorphous non-I sweeps away the I into an absolute future when it escapes itself and loses its position as a subject. Its "intention" no longer goes forth unto the light, unto the meaningful.[7]

Here the meaningful remains always clandestine, does not lose its mystery in the disclosed, escapes profanation, goes beyond the expressible. The "death" of the subject Levinas refers to implies the birth of the self, in love and through love, which "it itself was ineluctably pre-conditioned to become",[8] as Stephen Dedalus aptly notices in his paraphrase of D. Scotus' theological passage on the divinity of love.

For Levinas love is not a need to be fulfilled but the desire which is free of lack, never gratified as its object constantly withdraws, is never grasped. The other is accepted *en toto* as a person, a Thou rather than an it so the other-oriented mode of thinking is not knowing but, rather, an insatiable desire feeding on itself. The relationship with the other is absolute in the sense that the other can always absolve himself from this relation with his integrity intact. The situation seems to reflect the ideal of the chivalric love and the respect for and the cult of the woman, the exceptional position of the feminine in the economy of being. This implies that the woman is not the mysterious unknowable but a mode of being that does not ease to slip away from the light. Hopkins expresses well the idea in question when he refers to the "nestling, world-mothering air" of the woman that nurses man everywhere[9]:

> Worldmothering air, air wild,
> Wound with thee, in the isled,
> Fold home, fast fold thy child.

The same I-Thou relationship is articulated elsewhere in Hopkins as the moment of encounter that extends beyond the boundaries of self and enhances the very essence of self (cf. "self steeped and pashed").

The relation thus posited is inconceivable without the Thou which is not within the sphere of thought but remains as the indeterminate horizon of the encounter. Only in such a meeting one being confronts another in the intersubjective relationship in which the I truly affirms itself, its affirmation impossible without the presence of the Thou. This moment of the phenomenology of Love or the "pathos of love" as Levinas calls it is well described by Hopkins as "laced with the fire of stress", the metamorphosis caused by "the swoon of a heart" (Hopkins, *The of the Deutschland*) which results in a communion considered as the primary act of being. In Levinas' words:

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[7] Ibid., p. 254.

[8] James Joyce, *Ulisses* (New York: Random House, 1934), p. 494.

[9] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. Mackenzie (Oxford University Press, 1970), No. 60.

> Man can become whole not by virtue of the relation to himself but only by virtue of a relation to another self.[10]

This moment of the final self-affirmation is well described by Hopkins in *Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves*: "selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind". Only the self "steeped and pashed" can dialogue with the other since by opening oneself to the other one becomes responsible for him that is there "face to face". The self thus "dismembered, disremembered" does not seek the recognition of the other but a genuine communication (communion) with him which is not a limitation of one's self but a real participation in the dialogue with the ego deprived of its pride and imperialism characteristic of it. Levinas defines this moment as substitution, self-renunciation as the expulsion of self outside of itself. The substitution of the ego by the self is possible only through the other which in no way signifies a submission to the no-ego but the reverse, an openness to and an act of sacrifice for the other.

The responsibility for the other becomes obsession, a commitment to the other which precludes the return to oneself, not alienation but in-spiration in which the self is absolved of itself. We are reminded of the fact that we are all responsible for the others but, as Alyosha Karamazov holds it, "I am more responsible than anyone else." This moment of responsibility is labeled as the "responsibility for the responsibility of the other",[11] one more degree of responsibility to become oneself not as essence but as a sub-jectum that supports the whole of being. The relationship of such a status, the one between the subject and the other is communication that disregards indication, the semantic monstration as thematization and, as such, becomes the trace in which a face is ordered as irreducible to a sign. Instead of verbal communication Levinas' phenomenology of Eros proposes the epiphany of Face in which thematization as articulation is considered anarchic and destructive for the relation of the subject with the order.

In the phenomenology of Eros language is not the expression of one's view or opinion; it is the "face in which the other – the absolutely other – presents himself" and "does not do violence to it [the same] as do opinion or authority or the thaumaturgic supernatural".[12] Since the essence of language is being with the Other signification arises in being with language, within the primordial face to face with language. In Levinas' words:

> Signification resembles it [a potency that evinces the act] as an overflowing of the intention that envisages by the being envisaged. But here the inexhaustible surplus of infinity overflows the actuality of consciousness. The shimmer of infinity, the face, can no longer be stated in terms of consciousness, in metaphors referring to light and the sensible. It is the ethical exigency of the face, which puts into question the consciousness that welcomes it.[13]

[10] E. R. Smith (ed.), *Emmanuel Levinas. Between Man and Man* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 68.
[11] S. Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, p. 107.
[12] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 203.
[13] Ibid., p. 207.

This is the best description of poetic language, the one which signifies while relinguishing signification, undoes the structure of language, goes beyond the codes and systems. The surplus, the excess Levinas refers to, is that which opens man to the Other before saying anything, the "hyperbolic passivity of giving prior to all willing and thematization".[14]

The excess of language the poet experiences as saying (prior to speaking) is related to the "vigilance of insomnia", the always active presence of the other who breaks the rest of the same, interferes when equality tends to threaten with wakefulness falling to sleep. Insomnia as wakefulness exceeds the limits of intentionality as irreducible to the affirmation of the same and inclines towards the Other in the indeterminated, disinterested, immaterial way. This cry of "ethical revolt" is a recognition of the infinite obligation to the Other which overcomes intentionality and reveals the good that reigns beyond being. Levinas' "eternal vigilance", a waking dream, the wakefulness and insomnia, structure his ethics of the infinity and alterity, characterize existence not as the temporalizing movement but the one which is "an absolutely unavoidable presence",[15] the "incessance of presence" (infinity).

Phenomenology of Eros is supported by the philosophy of insomnia, eternal wakefulness which occurs in a nocturnal space as opposed to the diurnal light of thematization. It is in such a space that our security is threatened since silence, tranquillity and void of sensations to which one is exposed construct an absolutely indeterminate menace. The "horror of darkness" is not, however, an anxiety about or a danger of death but the fear of being different from Heideggerian fear of nothingness. Levinas' argument harkens back to the third Cartesian meditation which indicates that before the notion of oneself man possesses the sense of the infinity in him, the orientation towards the Other that overturns consciousness, the presence to self which is the end of the monadology of the "I think".

Phenomenology of Eros is the philosophy of alertness, patience and waiting for that which is to come and which still remains ungraspable, clandestine, the hidden that will never become a signification. The equivocation of such a situation, its metaphoricity is well described in Levinas' essay:

> The secret appears without appearing, not because it would appear half-way, or with reservation, or in confusion. The simultaneity of the clandestine and the exposed precisely defines *profanation*. It appears in equivocation. But it is profanation that permits equivocation – essentially erotic – not the reverse. . . . The simultaneity of the equivocation of this fragility and this weight of non-signifyingness, heavier than the weight of the formless real, we shall term *femininity*.[16]

The feminine is the vertiginous depth of what is not yet, of what remains between being and not-yet-being, the frailty of the Beloved, the equivocal which "plays

[14] S. Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, p. 183.
[15] Ibid., p. 30.
[16] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 257.

between speech and the renouncement of sppech",[17] the non-signifyingness of the face prior to "any finite thought and every thought of the finite".[18] The expression of the face, the relevation, is such that it provokes resistance, recalcitrance not in a negative sense of forcing violence or struggle but in the positive sense of generating a response to his welcome. This is the ethical attitude which arises from the presence of the infinite in the human and goes beyond intentionality. The concern of the Infinite with man via his [man's] relationship with another man in the mystery of encounter is the kernel of the phenomenology of Eros. In Levinas words:

> The Infinite is not indifferent to me. It is in calling me to other men that transcendence concerns me. In this unique intrigue of transcendence, the non-absence of the Infinite is neither presence, nor representation. Instead, the idea of the Infinite is to be found in my responsibility for the Other.[19]

According to Levinas love can be enacted only through the Infinite since then it is free of any teleological bias, different from the absorption in immanence and constitutive of alterity. For Levinas love is a mode of infinitizing rather than totalizing since the latter is synonymous with power, possessing and knowing. In love the proximity of the Other implies an absolute remoteness and pathos of distance and duality. The absence of the Other, never grasped and possessed aspires to the mystery of love which is the face-to-face without intermediacy, the love as awakening, a responsibility for another and a subjection to the Other. It is not the love without eros but one in which Eros is of phenomenological validity.

[17] Ibid., p. 260.
[18] Ibid., p. 197.
[19] Alan Montefiore (ed.), *Philosophy in France Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 112.

Ewa Borkowska

Lot przed światłem: kilka uwag na temat fenomenologii erosu u Emanuela Levinasa

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest fenomenologicznym ujęciem problematyki relacji z Innym, który nie jest przedmiotem pożądania (zaspokojenia potrzeby), lecz celem pragnienia metafizycznego „wolnego od braku", pragnienia, które zostaje zaspokojone w nieskończoności. Inny pobudza moje zatroskanie i odpowiedzialność, nie jest częścią mnie, lecz indywidualnością całościową i jednostkową. Między mną a Innym istnieje różnica i nieskończona odległość, której nie sposób przekroczyć, ująć w pojęcia czy uchwycić intuicją. Można jej tylko pragnąć. Pragnienie Innego jest pragnieniem nieskończoności, które ujawnia się w momencie spotkania z Innym, a zatem jest to doświadczenie w sferze etycznej (Levinas), która wyprzedza doświadczenie ontologiczne (Heidegger); pragnienie nieskończoności jawi się bowiem jako bardziej źródłowe niż jakiekolwiek myślenie rozumujące. Relacja z Innym to akt bezinteresownej radości, rozkoszowania się, odczucie ciepła i prawdziwego zadomowienia się, gdzie rodzi się ruch ku światłu, które przyciąga człowieka, daje mu szczęścia i prawdziwe odczucie *principium individuationis*. Pragnienie drugiego zwraca się przede wszystkim ku twarzy kobiety, która o coś prosi i coś nakazuje, wzywając do kontaktu, zatroskania i odpowiedzialności.

Ewa Borkowska

Le Vol avant la lumière: certaines remarques sur la phénoménologie de l'éros chez Emmanuel Lévinas

Résumé

L'article est une tentative de montrer du point de vue phénoménologique la relation avec l'Autre lequel n'est pas l'objet d'un désir (assouvissement d'un besoin), mais l'objectif d'un désir métaphysique „libre du manque", d'un désir qui sera assouvi dans l'infini. L'Autre éveille mon souci et mon sens de responsabilité, il n'est pas une partie du „moi", mais une individualité totale et unique. Entre le „moi" et l'Autre il existe une différence et une distance infinie qu'il est impossible de dépasser, conceptualiser ou saisir intuitivement. On ne peut que la désirer. Le désir de l'Autre est le désir de l'infini qui se révèle au moment de la rencontre avec l'Autre. Par conséquent, c'est une expérience dans le domaine éthique (Lévinas) qui précède l'expérience ontologique (Heidegger), car le désir de l'infini apparaît comme plus originel que n'importe quelle pensée „raisonnante". La relation avec l'Autre est un acte de la joie gratuite, de la (ré)jouissance, le sentiment de la chaleur et de la véritable familiarisation éveillant l'aspiration à la lumière, celle-ci attirant l'homme, lui procurant le bonheur et le véritable sentiment du *principium individuationis*. Le désir de l'Autre s'adresse avant tout au visage de la femme qui prie et ordonne en incitant au contact, au souci et à la responsabilité.

Marta Zając

Eroticism as Transgressive Sexuality: Some Reflections on Body, Death and Sex

> . . .the flesh and blood of dead men are commonly eaten and drunk to inspire. . .qualities for which men themselves were remarkable. . .
>
> . . .to lessen the dangers which are supposed to attend the operation. . .(t)he chief of Namosi in Fiji always ate a man by way of precaution when he had his hair cut.
>
> J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*[*]

An act of cannibalism performed by primitive man opposes the reductionist view of the body as defined through its physical tangibility. Man's flesh and blood appear as mediating spiritual values or function as agents in spell-breaking procedures.

When viewed as a sum total of its parts, organs, tissues and cells, and as such subject to thorough scientific investigations, the body appears to be fully mastered. The knowledge of it is predominantly of the encyclopaedic type, i.e. as a collection of facts instead of thought-provoking observations. However, despite its delusory concreteness, body still provokes reflections upon itself as "a continuous creation. . .energy system. . .never a complete structure. . .perpetual inner self-construction and self-destruction".[1] Body appears, then, as a sum of energy, open through its inner dynamics to constant change.

When viewed as an energy system, the body may be qualified through two conflicting tendencies: a tendency towards conservation of energy, and as such it remains a sort of "close-circuit system", with a vicious circle as a possible metaphor for it; and a tendency towards transgression, when the body persists due to continuous expansion. (The conservative and expansive tendencies can be roughly linked to the mentioned motives for cannibalism, i.e. precaution, and hope for

[*] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Papermac, 1992).

[1] Norman Brown, from "Love's Body", in *The Naked I* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1971), p. 346.

spiritual enrichment respectively.) These two modes of the body's being can be extended into a more comprehensive pattern. We find it possible to view *sexuality* and *death* as displaying, in a similar way, the potential both for regression and transcendence. Openness and closure, transcendence and regression, get realised in an open human being, thought and experience, or in a form sterile in its completeness.

Any controlled flow of energy displays certain morbid quality. When D. H. Lawrence, in his article "Pornography and Obscenity", opposes the practice of masturbation to sexual intercourse, he recognises a corpse-like quality induced in the body through the repeated acts of self-abuse: "there is no change, only deadening. There is what we call dead loss."[2] Death as progressive deadening, exhaustion of energy, may touch not only the body, but the mind as well. Certain mode of sensibility deviates into excessive egocentrism; self-analysis turns finally into self-abuse: "there is no real object, there is only subject. The author never escapes from himself, he pads along the vicious circle of the self. It is self absorption made public. . .Enclosed within the vicious circle of the self, with no vital contacts outside, the self becomes emptier and emptier, till its 'almost a nullus, a nothingness'."[3]

The concept of "the total universe", introduced by Susan Sontag in her essay "Pornographic Imagination", may be viewed as a variation of "a close-circuit system". A total universe has "the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into the one negotiable currency . . .".[4] The functioning of a total universe consists in a mere interchangeability of its elements, apparently endless passing from one form into another, limited, however, to strictly defined area of transformation. Susan Sontag calls the way the total universe operates – c a n n i b a l i s t i c . That would agree, however, only with one of the forms of cannibalism Frazer mentions, i.e. an act performed out of precaution, and as such, oriented towards the maintenance of an existing state of matter/s.

Following Susan Sontag's claim that "(t)he religious imagination survives for most people as not just the primary, but virtually the only credible instance of an imagination working in a total way",[5] a set of religious beliefs may be viewed as a model realisation of the idea of the total universe. The total vision of the Universe advanced through religious interpretation aims at providing all observable phenom-

[2] D. H. Lawrence, "Pornography and Obscenity", in *Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Frank Kermode and John Hollander (London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 455.

[3] Ibid., p. 456. (Lawrence advances one more image of man's mental and/or physical closure, taking into account the way man pictures himself in the universe. As he envisages mankind – "we cannot b e a r c o n n e c t i o n s". Man shuns all forms of the union with living, incarnate – cosmos; defines himself as a detached "fragment", not an organic "part"; consequently, standing above the whole network of relations, remains sterile in his disconnectedness.) (cf. D. H. Lawrence, "Apocalypse", in *Oxford Anthology*. . . ., p. 461.)

[4] Susan Sontag, "Pornographic Imagination", in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 66.

[5] Ibid., p. 69.

ena with lucid eschatological significance. All stories of the world carry the potential for being re-translated into the biblical concepts, and then incorporated into the history of Redemption.[6]

A similar pattern of effective translatability structures pornographic imagination, yet it develops there on a level different from the level of ideas. In pornographic literature "all action is conceived as a set of sexual exchanges",[7] it tends "to make one person interchangeable with another, and all people interchangeable with things".[8] The programmatic de-humanisation of characters is the condition for smooth transformative procedures. As all elements are in fact interchangeable, what really matters is the rhythm of their replacement. It may appear, then, that what is vile about pornography, the most intense evil it entails, does not consist in overt obscenity inherent to it, but in the dead-end progression.

Death may be, however, conceived also in another dimension; progressive deadening out of *lack* can be contrasted with the abrupt end which comes out of *excess*. Bataille claims that "human beings live only through excess".[9] It seems, however that, more specifically, while the *vision* of excess conditions l i f e, the *experience* of excess spells d e a t h. Hence, the progressive deadening, the process of dying extended over the whole life, let us call it "death-in-life", can be opposed to "life-towards-death", i.e. life motivated through the vision of excess, which ultimately brings the lethal experience of it.

Eroticism may be viewed as a sphere of life touched most extensively with death. As Nick Land observes following Bataille's thought: "(e)rotic love is unrestrained violence against every thing which stands against communion. . .God, cosmos, one's fellows and one's self".[10] Modern psychology

[6] In *Biblia tysiąclecia*, in the preface to *The Song of Solomon*, one can read: "Jest to jedyna w całym Piśmie Świętym księga, w której nie ma mowy ani o Bogu, ani o zbawieniu, ani o narodzie wybranym, i która nie zawiera żadnej myśli religijnej. Rozumiana w znaczeniu dosłownym jest ona po prostu poematem lirycznym o tematyce miłosnej. . . Dziś, dzięki rozwojowi nauk biblijnych, coraz bardziej jasnym się staje, że Pnp, mimo pewnego podobieństwa do utworów pozabiblijnych, korzeniami tkwi w Biblii, i jest dojrzałym owocem myśli teologicznej proroków Ozeasza, Jeremiasza, Ezechiela, oraz Deutero-Izajasza (rozdz. 40–66) o oblubieńczym stosunku Boga do narodu wybranego, a także o nawróceniu i powrocie narodu-oblubienicy po wielu niewiernościach do łaski. Powrót ten, dzięki bezgranicznemu miłosierdziu Obrażonego, ma w sobie całą świeżość pierwszej miłości. . i całą radość zaślubin" (p. 745). Consequently, the passage: "for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land" (*The Song of Solomon*: 2, 11–12) we are called to interpret as a symbol of a new life in the regained Palestine; the words: "(i)t was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him, whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me" (*The Song of Solomon*: 3, 4) are to evoke the image of the soul turning, fervently, to God again. (cf. *Biblia tysiąclecia*, p. 749).

[7] Susan Sontag, "Pornographic. . .", p. 66.

[8] Ibid., p. 53.

[9] After Susan Sontag, "Pornographic. . .", p. 61.

[10] Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 193.

recognizes sex and death as two biological aspects of misterium tremendum.[11] The veil is rent for an instant, and the mystery of being approaches fulfillment through the moments of sexual ecstasy as well as death spasms. An act of erotic communion, the moment the body transcends its boundaries, (the transcendence parallel to the mental transcendence of the self), marks "the unity of death, or of the consciousness of death and eroticism".[12]

Eroticism can be linked to death also as a form of communication; communication implies self-exposure to the impact of the unpredictable, the rupture of the vicious circle of the self, openness to the unknown. Therefore, "communication is opened by death alone".[13] In the erotic act, body opens itself, abandons all protection, lets the integrity of its functioning be endangered. Hence, "to love is to bleed".[14] The close-circuit of the blood flow opens, the rupture of the blood vascular system results in excessive bleeding.[15]

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It seems that pornography and eroticism may be conceived as two aspects of sexuality, the realisations of the potential sexuality carries both for regression and transcendence.

In pornography, even if "transcendence of personality as the highest good"[16] can be observed that transcendence is oriented towards "the perfection of becoming a thing".[17] Human beings undergo progressive reduction to the purely instrumental treatment. The body as a static container of sexual organs remains an instrument in "sexual exchanges". As psychology means "psychology of lust",[18] the flow of energy is not hindered by any extra-corporeal complexities.

Eroticism, in turn, emerges as a sphere shaped by the *transgressive* aspects of the body and death. The body's energy to transcend its limits points to an inner dynamics, which at the peak level constantly approaches death; death as the consummation of life-processes.

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[11] Cf. Rollo May, *Miłość i wola* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 1993), p. 113.

[12] Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. X, p. 585, after Nick Land, *The Thirst for*. . ., p. 191.

[13] Nick Land, *The Thirst for*. . ., p. 192.

[14] Ibid., p. 192.

[15] Foucault puts sexuality and death into yet another relation. Death appears for him as an element in what he calls "the Faustian pact" of our century. Foucault finds modern society eager to "exchange life for sex itself"; as it is "through sex. . .that each individual has to pass in order to get access to his own intelligibility. . ., to the whole of his body. . .to his identity"; sex is worth dying for. In this sense, exclusively "sex is imbued with death-instinct. Nowadays, it is sex, not love, that claims the equivalence of death" (cf. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction* (Middlesex, New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 155–156.) While various values supplant one another, death as a constant indicates the intensity of desire these values induce. Hence, even if death is not an object of desire, it accompanies it almost to the point of merging.

[16] Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic. . .", p. 60.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Cf. ibid., p. 40.

Marta Zając

Erotyzm jako seksualność transgresywna: uwagi o ciele, śmierci i płci

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę odejścia od statycznego modelu ciała, które staje się „systemem energii", „strukturą otwartą". Model statyczny i dynamiczny – lub inaczej zachowawczy i ekspansywny – można także przenieść na rozważania nad seksualnością i śmiercią. W świetle tego modelu pornografia, jako kontrolowany, niekreatywny przepływ energii, stanowi zaprzeczenie estetyki i erotyki, która – w ujęciu Bataille'a – jest „komunikacją, otwarciem poprzez śmierć".

Marta Zając

Erotisme comme sexualité transgressive: remarques sur le corps, la mort et le sex

Résumé

L'article est une tentative d'abandonner le modèle statique du corps, celui-ci devenant un „système d'énergie", une „structure ouverte". Le modèle statique et dynamique – ou, autrement dit: conservateur et expansif – peut être également appliqué aux considérations sur la sexualité et la mort. A la lumière de ce modèle, la pornographie en tant que courant (passage) d'énergie non contrôlé et non créatif constitue le contraire de esthétique et de l'érotique qui, selon Bataille, est „communication, ouverture par la mort".

BUŚ

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